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The Difficulties Inherent in Cultural Diversity: Overcoming the Reasons Why Most Diversity Efforts Fail

Abstract

This presentation takes a hard look at the difficulties inherent in cultural diversity. These factors are often overlooked or disregarded with regard to diversity, leave well-meaning efforts short of their intended target. Workshop participants will consider a list of factors that are at work when most diversity efforts fail and attempt to develop solutions that will lead to progress.

John Leonard Harris

Founder and Principal Consultant, Harris Consulting Services

Cultural diversity and its proper place on the higher education agenda has been an issue debated heavily for the last three to four years. Higher education administrators, professors, and students have spent a great deal of time and money attending numerous conventions, conferences, symposiums, workshops, and forums, searching for answers to the illusive cultural diversity questions.

Participation in many of these well-meaning brainstorming and strategy sessions is best manifested by the desire of many to create an amicable environment for all in the campus community, regardless of race, color, gender, sexual preference or physical impairment. However, the dilemma lies in the simple, yet subtle realities associated with this issue. While there are many with good intentions, there are only a few who clearly understand the process by which real change in the area of cultural diversity will occur. Until those who are working to affect change in the area of cultural diversity come to understand what it is that they are really working for they will continue to “spin their wheels” with little to show for their efforts.

The crucial issue to success in the area of cultural diversity in higher education is getting many of the self-proclaimed experts to stop oversimplifying the concept. Amazingly, many of the experts believe a change for the better on college and university campuses is only an administrative mandate or a policy decision away from reality. These well-meaning people seem to think that forceful words from the board of regents or university president of predominant white institutions hold the missing pieces to the difficult and hard to solve cultural diversity puzzle. Nothing could be further from the truth.

For some reason, as the quest for action and change on the cultural diversity front continues, people miss the real reason why they are not getting any return on their investment. The reason is simply this. A strategy that focuses primarily on affecting change in an environment and does not focus on affecting change in the people in the environment is a losing strategy. Those who comprise the dominant group on the college and university campuses, be they black, white, red, yellow, or brown, must see that diversity begins first from the inside. Diversity and the reality of interaction with people, who are different, must become something that people come to grips with mentally. Herein lies the missing piece to the cultural diversity puzzle.

To believe for one moment that cultural diversity is something that someone gives to someone or does for someone is definitely a misnomer. The concept of cultural diversity in and of itself is great, however, people must be clear as to what it is that they are actually working toward.

The difficulties inherent in cultural diversity are pervasive, but often overlooked or disregarded. For any success to happen in their area, these difficulties must be examined thoroughly. Anything less is futile at best.

Presenter

John Leonard Harris is a native of St. Louis, Missouri. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Speech and Dramatic Arts from the University of Missouri-Columbia and his Master of Education degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He has been married to his wife, Charlene for nineteen years and they have four children. Mr. Harris is the Founder and Principal Consultant for Harris Consulting Services through which he provides cultural education, leadership, organizational effectiveness and motivational programs. He is also Founder and President of Encouragement Unlimited, Inc., a faith-based nonprofit organization that serve as an active agent of hope and renewal for the forgotten, undervalued, unappreciated, and disadvantaged in our society. Additionally, Mr. Harris partners with churches, community organizations and state agencies whose mission is to serve low-income families and at-risk youth. Mr. Harris is an award-winning writer and local newspaper columnist. He is a popular keynote and conference speaker. His presentation topics range from religion to rap, media to motivation, family to freedom and self-esteem to service.