

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY

What is Celebrating Diversity?

Celebrating diversity is the demonstration of the commitment to encouraging others to be who they are and live the lives that are right for them without judgement (so long as they are not harming others).

Why is it important to celebrate diversity?

When we celebrate the uniqueness of all clients, every individual of our team, other stakeholders and our colleagues within our industry group, we develop a much richer and rewarding environment to engage with. Everyone has the potential to benefit, feel valued and grow through the experience of connecting to different ideals, philosophies, cultures and models of living life authentically.

History shows us many examples of where diversity is quashed as well as wonderful examples of where it is celebrated in such a way to have both social and business environmental improvements.

According to the Stop Discrimination website of the European Union, "Recent research with organisations across Europe (a suitable collection of research for us in Australia to review) shows how creating and managing a diverse organisation can provide real benefits, whether they are in the private, public or not-for-profit sectors; whether they are large or small. Diversity management strategies can help to create a link between the internal and external aspects of the work of an organisation."

Although the above refers to organisations, it's important to keep in mind that any professional has the opportunity to consider the value of diversity in terms of how they demonstrate leadership within their career and/or business, and in terms of how they connect with other professionals and clients.

Here are some benefits for organisations and/or professionals for celebrating diversity:

- Attracting, recruiting and retaining people from a wide "talent" base
- Reducing the costs of labour turnover and absenteeism
- Contributing to employee flexibility and responsiveness
- Building employee commitment, morale and "discretionary effort"
- Enhancing creativity and innovation
- Improving knowledge of how to operate in different cultural settings
- Improving the understanding of the needs of employees, colleagues and clients

- Assisting in the development of new products, services and marketing strategies
- Enhancing ones personal reputation and/or the business reputation and image

On an individual level, consider how important it is for you to feel valued for the uniqueness you bring to the professional setting. You're not the only person who feels this way; so do your teammates, clients and your potential clients.

Therefore, it makes good humanistic and business sense to have a sincere interest and appreciation for the unique view, background, framework and identify of each person you connect with in a professional context.

Most philosophies and cultures have some form of what's often referred to as "The Golden Rule" where essentially you treat other people in the same way as you would wish to be treated. This includes not judging others as being judged is something that neither you nor they would typically appreciate.

The main rule of thumb: Ensure others know how much you value them for any and/or all the reasons you do and to do so without judgement.

Why is it so easy to slip up in the area of celebrating diversity?

There are two distinct areas where diversity isn't celebrated to the standard we look for at High Ideals: Being judgemental and not recognising the value of diversity.

We all have opinions, and yes, we all also make judgements. Let's take the word "discrimination" as an example. This word is actually derived from the Greek root meaning "to make a choice" and when we see the current version in a positive framework, such as in "to have discriminating taste", it is referring to making choices based on interest, exploration and even expertise.

However, we also have the negative connotation that typically refers to excluding a person or a group based on not being "good enough". Although I'm oversimplifying it here, this view also helps us to draw a very simple distinction between which types of judgement we may be using in any situation.

When we're not paying attention to the type of judgement we're making, we're putting ourselves at risk of missing out on a valuable contribution or experience, and worse, we're potentially causing harm to others.

As for recognising the value of diversity, there are many excuses which may get in the way of us even considering the value and benefits of celebrating diversity. In some cases, it could be a sense that we're "too busy" to pay attention, while in other situations it may simply be a total or near-total lack of awareness.

Much of the time it is likely to be that we can be operating solely from our own perspective of the world, our own needs, and not thinking about the needs of others and the various viewpoints they may have to offer.

The key strategy here is to “get out of our own way” so that we can value others.

Tips for celebrating diversity

- Identify and acknowledge the kinds of diversity that are important to you and to your professional context, such as to your business.
- Work with different stakeholders to understand how they see and value the importance of celebrating diversity. Include your teammates, vendors, partners and clients.
- Develop a Celebrating Diversity Policy for yourself as a professional and/or for your business and ensure it can be viewed by or shared with others. Keep in mind that the best of these statements are those that are measurable.
- Review the impact of your celebrating diversity strategies.
- Regularly challenge yourself to consider who would have a different point of view or perspective to add to any discussion and include them.
- Learn from others and benchmark what you are doing.

Characteristics and/or Behaviours of a person who celebrates diversity

- They engage with lots of different types of people and comment on what they gain from that level of exposure to different groups, cultures and ideas.
- They challenge others when they observe judgemental behaviour, exclusion tactics and/or out-right discrimination.
- They behave in a way that makes other people feel valued.
- They actively seek to understand the lives of others.
- In appropriate and relevant ways they integrate the knowledge and experience they gain from others’ cultures into their own, including into their own professional culture.
- They are open-minded and have a reputation for it.

Evaluate your own perspective on celebrating diversity

- What is the value of diversity as you see it in a personal sense?
- What is the value of diversity as you see it in a professional sense, if different?

- How well do you think you celebrate diversity generally? What evidence (experience and feedback) to you have to support that view?
- What policies, procedures, strategies etc do you have for your business (either your own or the one you work for) related to celebrating diversity?
 - How well do you abide by these?
 - How well does your organisation?
 - How is this measured?
 - What feedback do you and/or your organisation receive about this?
- How uncomfortable do you feel when you engage with someone whose culture is very different from your own, generally? Are there any cultures, or ways people live their lives that you find more difficult to understand and/or be comfortable around? What are you thinking, feeling and doing in those situations?
- Consider a range of people you work with (colleagues, employees, customers, vendors), and, if you want to, make a list of them. Now consider what judgements you may have regarding each and the impact that judgement has (if any) on you, them and others. Remember that judgement doesn't necessarily have to mean a "negative" one. Just be honest and consider the range of opinions you have, how you evaluate others and their worth, and what you use that information for.

Improve your degree of celebrating diversity as a professional skill

After you have completed your evaluation, if you have noticed some room for improvement, you might like to try some of the following strategies:

- Seek feedback from your colleagues and clients about how well they perceive that you are open-minded, non-judgemental and celebrate diversity. Be sure to check on all three categories of feedback. Acknowledge and thank them for their feedback, without trying to "dispute" it and make commitments to them about what you will do with the feedback they have provided.
- Consider interviewing people who you believe celebrate diversity as a professional skill very well. Look on it as doing some field research; get curious and explore the various ways celebrating diversity (in any/all its forms) can have a positive personal, professional and business impact.
- Explore the resources on the next page and develop an action plan regarding any that you feel are relevant to your situation and goals.

Further resources

If you would like to develop further in the area of celebrating diversity, the following resources may be worth considering.

Please note that High Ideals does not endorse or receive any direct benefit from recommending the following resources. The list is simply a suggestive collection of materials that members of the High Ideals management team have found useful in their own development.

- **Harmony Day** - <http://www.harmony.gov.au/> - Explore this site from the Australian Government and it's links to Harmony Day which is 21st March (in Australia although it may be different days in other countries), which celebrates the cohesive and inclusive nature of our nation and promotes the benefits of cultural diversity.
- **Organisational Diversity: Celebrating Diversity in the Workplace** – This is a factsheet produced by the Victorian Government as part of their High Performance Toolkit. You can download your copy here:
http://www.business.vic.gov.au/busvicwr/assets/main/lib60037/14_hpt5-1celebratingdiversity.pdf
- **Diversity Training: Celebrating Diversity in the Workplace** – This is a complete curriculum and lesson plans set for delivering diversity training in your workplace. This could be a useful tool if you want to run courses on this in your professional environment. More information can be found at this link:
http://www.trainingmaterials.com/soft_skills_courseware/course.asp?id=s0901
- **Celebrating Diversity: Working with Groups in the Workplace** by Cheryl Hetherington. This book teaches groups to understand the similarities and differences between people including through typical diversity discussion categories of gender, race and ethnic groups. It can help you put together a workshop that establishes a thoughtful and positive environment for attitude change, learning and growth.
- <http://www.stop-discrimination.info/95.o.html> - This is an initiative of the European Union and the site has lots of useful information focused on "For Diversity. Against Discrimination". There are useful fact sheets and information to assist businesses and professionals to identify risks around discrimination and how to promote diversity in all its forms.
- <http://www.high-ideals.com> – Check out the Member Directory section for High Ideals members who offer services which could support you, such as coaching, mentoring or consulting on High Ideals criteria/values.
- **Aiming Higher: 25 stories of how companies prosper by combining sound management and social vision** by David Bollier

Author and editor acknowledgement

High Ideals would like to acknowledge and thank Noel Posus for his work on this document. Noel Posus is the Director of Training, Research and Development for High Ideals as well as a professional coach, educator and author. To find out more about Noel, please visit his profile on the High Ideals directory by clicking [here](#) and search by name.

This document is part of the **High Ideals** Criteria Information Series, edited by Claire Stretch. For more information on Claire please visit her profile on the High Ideals directory by clicking [here](#) and search by name.

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