

Diversity at Work in London

Newsletter



Diversity at Work
in London

Updates



Dear Readers,

We are pleased to announce our new client, Conestoga College in Kitchener, Ontario. Since our readership is now international, we are very aware of the need for resources out there to assist organizations to manage their workplace diversity effectively. In response, we will be producing our own materials,

webinars, films and manuals. In a month's time you will notice a special link on our website for resources for purchase. Our first on demand webinar will be, "Diversity and Inclusion On A Budget".

Diversity At Work will also be presenting this material at the Human Resources Professional Association at their Diversity Conference on November 18, 2010. We are very pleased to work with this organization that is so well known for delivering best practices in human resources management.

I would like to welcome our new associates Wen Zou, who assists with project management and technical support and Katsiaryna Hertman who designs the marketing materials and provides research assistance.

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EDITORIAL

The Perils of Political Correctness in the Workplace

Call it *chutzpah*, call it daring or call it plain insanity! Why would a diversity consultant want to take on the topic like the perils of political correctness? Isn't this called career suicide? Put simply, it is because it is important, and it is crippling our workplaces. True to my original intent of this newsletter, which is to deliver best practices for managing workplace diversity, but also to deal with some of the diversity related issues that no one wants to talk about, I have decided to tackle this issue head-on.

I am quite concerned that many workers are becoming disengaged and turned off by diversity and inclusion initiatives, because a "me" vs. "them" attitude can be taken on by consultants who have a particular agenda.

In my previous professional life before starting my own business, I worked in some politically charged sectors. There was new lingo each day that was created, by an elite few, who then expected the rest of the world to be familiar with it and to adopt it whole heartedly. I saw right before me how the dogma of political correctness easily castigated and excluded a good percentage of the world.

Let me put this into some context. It was 1990 and the time of my first university graduation from (as what I now jokingly refer to) as a Marxist/Feminist School of Sociology. Like many young people who finish university that are endowed with passion and social activism, I was no different. When I look back at my reading list Marx, Engels, Bell Hooks, Andrea

Dworkin and others come to mind. It was a revolutionary time for me, and as such I began to consider some of what this could mean. For example, should we continue to spell "women" this way? Or, maybe, as it was proposed in my feminist readings, that I should spell it "wimmin" or "womyn". In any case, I knew what the point was, to eliminate any traces of the word "men" in the spelling. I detest bad spelling, so to consider this was not an option for me.

But it did not stop there. In the sector that I worked in, I saw immigrant women being denied jobs because they were not considered feminist enough. I saw these women exploited for information, but not deemed good enough to be part of the circle. For me, this was unconscionable. Feminism to me had many shapes, colours and orientations and the one that these PC (Politically Correct) feminists were advocating was very exclusive. There are all kinds of immigrant women who may have never heard of Gloria Steinem, but they have been leaders and advocates of social change in their country of origin. If that isn't feminism, what is?

Not much later in my career, I witnessed a leading and respected Psychologist/Researcher being told to omit some of the findings of his research because it did not fit the agenda that the agency was advocating. I was shocked and saw first hand, how some interest groups had a part in shaping what information is given out to the public, and what is not. The sad part is that the study's results

could have had an incredible role in positive social change! Ugh!

Those are only two of the many experiences I have had as an employee. But what you might find more interesting are some of the predicaments that employers have shared with me, ones that are creating incredible turmoil and a backlash against racialized groups, people with disabilities, aboriginal, and gay people. Let's take a look at a few examples that have been brought to my attention:

- A gay man who regularly harasses a straight man at work.
- Publicly funded programs that can only be accessed exclusively by one group.
- Managers who are afraid to reprimand or give constructive criticism to members of racialized groups because they are afraid of the "racial card" being thrown at them or having a discrimination lawsuit.
- Mainstream workers who are tired of performance problems with some members of racialized groups.
- A visually impaired woman who bullies her co-worker each day because of his accent.

(Continued on page 3)

Our workplaces are becoming increasingly diverse and thus complex. If you were a manager experiencing one of the above problems in the workplace, what would you do? From what I seem to be hearing, many of you would not challenge the spending of public funds on one group, or you wouldn't confront your diverse employee for their bad performance or behaviour. Then, this begs the question, what is workplace equity about? Is it for just some or is it for everyone?

This is one of the parts about political correctness that makes me insane (I would say hysterical, but that's sexist!). Why do we let some people perform badly and continue to let them get away with it? Is it because we are afraid they will file a grievance, or take their case to human rights? Meanwhile, if Joe Mainstream performs the same way, he could be reprimanded and warned. Seems a little unfair I would say, and the sooner that we tackle these disparities in the workplace the better. More than ever these days, we need productive and respectful workplaces and every person has a responsibility to make it that way.

One of the things that I do like about political correctness is how it has helped to improve how we talk and write about different kinds of people with more respect. As a woman, I really appreciate the gender neutral language. I applaud the disability activists and aboriginal activists for illuminating us with appropriate terminology.

I have to say that I am a little confused, however, with the various terms that are used these days for people who are not "white". I have heard quite the gamut here, like "black" (which appears to be the most common

in Canada), "visible minorities" (still used but is considered racist), "ethnocultural" (again, another term that is supposedly racist), and "people of colour" that is often used by activists. I think we are all really stumped with the correct label here, so stumped that I have heard many people call our black communities, African-American. Where did they get the "American" from? Now to make things even more complicated we have a new descriptor that is "racialized groups" which is supposed to encompass probably all of the above.

Using politically correct words make us feel aware, informed and respectful. However, I would like to add that using politically correct language doesn't necessary mean that you "walk the talk" when it comes to diversity. Words are only a small part in creating a respectful work environment.

Let me explain what I mean. Carol is one of the managers involved in some consulting work that I had been doing. Carol was from a very small town in South-western Ontario, and recently moved to London because the corporation had relocated. Carol was very enthusiastic about creating a diverse and inclusive workplace. Then one day she referred to one of her staff as "Negro" and her co-worker also from the same small town referred to the same staff as "coloured". These women were talking empathetically about how this worker was being treated poorly by the patients because of her skin colour. Well, as you can imagine, I was a bit shocked to hear those labels used in this day and age, and I found myself immediately wondering whether these women were racist. After

all, where had they been? These words have been out of the lexicon for almost 40 years!

As the weeks went on, I learned a valuable lesson from all of this, using the right words doesn't always mean too much. It became increasingly apparent that these women had very little exposure to people of other races, ethnicities and religions. Regardless of this drawback, these women were very open to learning and working with others and they came up with some excellent ways of supporting the black worker. As the saying goes, "actions speak louder than words".

While I was facilitating this discussion, I could have corrected her, which probably would have made her embarrassed in front of the group, and then, she would not have come up with the strategies that she did. But I chose not to, not because I thought her words were okay, because they were not, but because this wasn't the time to challenge her. Later, I would offer her some examples of more respectful language.

Probably, the most I ever learned about political correctness was from a Jewish-Muslim Women's Group that I chaired a number of years ago. Because I had a background in anti-racism and anti-hate, I was called upon by the Jewish community to use my outreach skills to bring some Jewish and Muslim Arab women together. This was around the time of the second *intifada* (*Palestinian-Israeli uprising*), to this day I wonder what was I thinking when I decided to take this on at such an emotionally and politically charged time – but I did anyhow.

(Continued on page 4)

These brave rebel women decided that they wanted to take part in the group because they felt a need to get to know their Semitic cousins for the purposes of creating a pocket of peace in London, Ontario. Not a bad goal, I would have to say! To make a long story short they decided at the onset that there would be "no terminal politeness", phoniness or political correctness. They wanted to have a real dialogue: the good, the bad and the ugly. They realized that if they were going to constantly skirt the issues that were so dear to them, they would never get to know one another. And they did! Suicide bombing and Israeli Occupation were put on the table for discussion. This was important to them.

The moral of the story here is that sometimes political correctness can get in the way of really getting to know people better. They learned a lot from

one another, they prayed, ate and attended different events together. Although there weren't any long-term friendships, a respect has remained. None of this would have happened if the women had decided to be terminally polite.

I challenge you to take the workplace examples that I have noted in this editorial to your next meeting and ask yourselves these questions: Am I ignoring behaviours which are creating inequities in the workplace? Do I know how to handle sensitive performance and behavioural issues in the workplace? Do I know where to get the resources and support to handle employee diversity related issues equitably? Does my organization have policies and procedures in place to protect all employees and support management?

In this issue you will hear from some readers about how political

correctness has affected their work. As expected, the response was slow. Among some of the readers that I approached, there was a fear of letting their opinions known, and so they decided to opt out.

Someone who is not afraid of challenging political correctness is Jonathan Kay, Managing Editor of the National Post. We are very grateful that he agreed to be interviewed for Diversity Works! And we have included some links to his articles.

Cheers!

Evelina Silveira,
Editor and President



Diversity at Work
in London



The Pros and Cons of the Political Correctness Debate

Pro	Con
Prevents people from getting offended by avoiding stereotypes insults and disrespect.	Considered to be antithetical to liberalism, denying freedom of speech and action, thus closing debate.
Changing language is the first step in changing intolerant societal values.	Being politically correct stops you from speaking your mind and having other people get to know your true self.
Aims to achieve its objectives of treating people fairly, usually without violence.	It has been equated as a form of fascism that is dictated by virtue rather than reason.

Interview with Jonathan Kay,

Managing Editor, Comment [The National Post](#)

D@W – How long have you been working as a journalist?

JK: Since the Fall of 1998, when the National Post started up. I came to work as an editorial writer. And gradually became a columnist and section editor.

D@W – In that time frame, can you tell us what kind of impact political correctness has had on the stories and commentaries that we read in our newspapers?

JK: I think the problem was at its worst in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when I was in university. Since then, there has been a backlash from conservatives and principled liberals against the resultant censorship. My understanding is that it is still very difficult for university professors in the liberal-arts departments of universities to escape the confines of political correctness. And some NGOs seem paralyzed by PC. And then, of course, there are the human-rights-commission stories of political correctness gone amok. But other than that -- in most of society, including mainstream journalism -- I think most people can say what they think. It is possible, for instance, to report on the massive concentration of fatherlessness and crime in black communities, or of the terrorism threat in the Muslim community. Most of my exposure to political correctness comes when I go to conferences put on by activists and the diversity consultants who have been co-opted into their particular agendas.

D@W - You have mentioned that one of your privileges as a journalist (unlike many other occupations) is your ability to write candidly about politically charged and sensitive issues. A lot of your opinion editorials have to do with aspects of diversity. What article did you write that created the most reaction? Have you ever felt that you pushed the button too far?

JK: Here are the articles that really caused a massive (generally positive) reaction.

<http://www.canada.com/nationalpost/news/story.html?id=ae1b9b58-4f38-461f-83d0-c006505b9865>

<http://www.nationalpost.com/White+guilty+Whiteness+workshop+helps+expose+your+inner+racist/2758198/story.html>

Not sure I can think of a case where I went too far.

D@W – In your opinion, does political correctness have any redeeming qualities?

JK: I do think there are cases in which people should be made to sit back and think about the words they choose. For instance, I remember reading something a while back about how the word "hysterical" is almost always used to describe a woman ... whereas we tend to use words like "angry" for men. And so I tend to think carefully about my word choice in situations like that -- so that I don't buy into stereotypes that attribute excessive emotionalism to women. Words really do affect our thoughts, so I think it is a valid project to examine the sort of different language we use to describe different groups of people. But I think the focus should be on pointing out these things to people (for instance, by statistical studies of the number of times particular words or phrases are used to describe members of certain groups versus members of other groups, as in the "hysterical" example above) -- not forcing the issue with speech codes and disciplinary hearings.

D@W - Why do many of your critics call you a "racist"? How would you like your readers to understand you?

JK: Whenever I've been called a racist, Islamophobe, etc., it usually is from someone who is in the world of academia or activism -- which, as mentioned above, have become self-contained worlds of political correctness. To people who inhabit that world, my views probably do

sound rather shocking, since I don't subscribe to the sort of dogmas that characterize those milieus (for instance, the dogma that says that all native problems are caused by white bigotry, or the dogmas that says high rates of black crime are caused by racism, as opposed to, say, social and cultural dysfunctionality within certain black subcultures).

D@W – You have mentioned that radical anti-racism has "become not only a cult of censorship, but a mental toxin as irrational and destructive as racism itself". It is clear that you do not deny that racism in this country exists, but as you have noted, perhaps not to the extent it once was. In your opinion, is it really productive to keep on talking about promoting differences in the workplace or should we be more focused on the business of creating cohesion and inclusion through our similarities?

JK: I think the focus has to be on similarities -- because it is farcical to think of there being a special black, or gay, or Jewish, or Indian style of law, accountancy or medicine (aside from language skills). The capitalist, English-language society we live in has the effect of producing a homogenous work environment in which people are required to have the same set of skills. To be specific: I dispute the idea that diversity -- which I would define as the arithmetic addition of people from different backgrounds, skin colours, religions and ethnic groups -- has any value for its own sake, except in the narrow and obvious sense that people from different backgrounds tend to have different language skills and sets of business contacts.

The National Post
<http://www.nationalpost.com/>

To read Jonathan Kay's opinion editorials visit:
<http://fullcomment.nationalpost.com/author/jonkay88/>

Views from Our Readers

Once again the government has given us an illusion of directions on how we should as a multi-cultural society interact with each other. Having politically correct names for each group is now a daunting effort to know what and which term should be used. As an example the government has chosen Aboriginal to refer to First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples. My experience though shows that there is a lack of knowledge in the workplace that the term refers to three distinct groups . I would suggest that the folks responsible for political correctness publish a glossary of terms that we can refer to so the confusion is minimized for speakers and the recipients.

Dwight Powless
*Community Liaison Resource
Algonquin College Access Program (ACAP)
Corporate and Business Development*



The advent of political correctness has added another dimension to my work, in that it has forced me to

balance expectations both within and external to the community. In addition to the ethno-cultural values, expectations, mores and traditions, which are at play, one has to balance these with a political correctness on many issues that involve the community from the outside. This has made our jobs a bit more difficult in the context of integration with what is traditionally viewed as mainstream society and culture. It has however highlighted the important of cultural advocacy and an increased understanding & tolerance of diversity from both sides, in our daily work and lives.

Dr. Dev Sainani
*President of the Hindu Cultural Centre
Chairman, The SAINA Group*
www.hcclondon.ca



Political correctness comes from the idea of inclusion, which is something I strive for at every step of an employee's path. However, political correctness can be a pendulum that swings too far. Safety has to be a priority. The greater good must win out in certain situations. And, at the end of the day a company is in business to create a product or deliver a service on the market. The challenge is to find the right balance.

Jen Denys,
*B.A., CHRP, CPC
The Right Path Consulting Group*

Former Prime Minister of Canada once said, "You have to look at history as an evolution of society." As a Canadian Citizen who immigrated from Democratic Republic of Congo and speaks multiple languages (English, French, Greek, Kiswahili, Lingala) Canada has made me feel extraordinarily welcomed. I came to Canada with one small luggage, some pocket money and lots of skills to make my ambitions and dreams become a reality. With the assistance of non-profit organizations I was able to establish myself with the daily venues of living in Canada. I made it a point to learn the official languages of Canada to be able to communicate in English and French which would assist me with further work opportunities. Currently, I work for Citizenship and Immigration as an Immigration Settlement Officer and pleased to render my services to different Francophone organizations that deal with new comers to Canada. Also assist African communities who assist new comers mainly women and children. As Diversity is one true thing we all have in common and we celebrate it every day!

*Jean-Claude Kilubi
Citizenship and Immigration Canada*

Ask the Elocution Instructor



Dear Elocution Instructor:

My company hires many individuals for whom English is not their first language. Here is an issue that I'd like to rectify with them and I need some guidance: First of all, in conversation, my employees will use politically incorrect terms. This is to say they will call someone, not by name, but by their nationality followed by man or woman. Furthermore, they will describe people's features by race followed by the part of the body they're describing. And this is not all, it gets worse. I don't believe they know that what they're saying is wrong, but for me it's uncomfortable and a bit unsettling.

Signed: I Need Some Guidance

Although, the basis of this column addresses issues that pertain to elocution and sound reduction, voice and use of vocabulary are part of this arena and so, from this angle, I'll try give a response to the issue you're addressing – political correctness.

I've said elsewhere in this column that voice, the word, is central to determining personality. What we say, how we say it and how we sound saying it, can say much about ourselves: establish gender, age, mood, attitude, fluency of language, socio-economic background and/or education. Oral and

written skills are at premium in our information society, therefore, it's good to have a good understanding of the benefits and implications of voice as so many of our responses to it are subliminal.

Political correctness refers to the rules that govern the workplace and aims for equality before the law. In form, it is word based and, in this case, adheres to North American working middle-class values. So that when one hears someone say or behave outside this framework, one feels unsettled, so you are justified in your sentiment.

It's been about 20 years since *political correctness* re-entered our lexicon and since then the professional realm seems to have encompassed more our everyday lives. Culturally, English speaking North America seems to be much more susceptible to this trend. And to New Arrivals to this part of the continent becoming aware of this can be a jolt of culture shock.

As an educator, I am frequently told by my students that many of the things that we find politically incorrect are told in their countries of origin, though pejoratively speaking, as terms of endearment – a linguistic paradox. Therefore, it is never altogether easy to address to a New Comer what is politically correct, or rather, politically incorrect, for it is the violation of these conventions that we find alarming.

Your observation, regarding your employees not "knowing", may also be correct. For many New Canadians transitioning from working-class to middle-class values can seem like a great obstacle to overcome, some may achieve it more successfully than others. Also, in "knowing", one is expecting that the New Comer will be able decipher the complex uses, subtleties and nuances of the English language, when in fact, for the most part, they, no matter how fluent,

continue to make literal translations of linguistic and cultural issues. It bears to mention that the process of cultural assimilation is complex and lengthy.

In such instances it's best to seek out the services and advice of a professionally trained individual in this field. To have them come to your place of work, meet with your employees and, amongst other things:

- Present political correctness as equality and law.
- Workshop issues pertaining to political correctness: expressions and attitudes.
- Address issues pertaining to political incorrectness: ramifications and consequences.
- Offer alternative vocabulary and modes of expression.
- Device strategies for conflict resolution.

Also, within gender and ethno-sensitive groups one can:

- Contact Community Services and be connected with a professional who can communicate these issues in an environment and language of their choosing.

Businesses have a duty to their employees. This is particularly true of businesses where diversity is already at work. By providing support, tools and references, businesses can facilitate New Comers to make a more successful transition into their professional lives.

Elocution Teacher

Alfredo Garcia

Advertise in Diversity Works!

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Best Practices for Handling Diversity Dialogues in the Workplace

In, Sondra Thiederman's book, *Making Diversity Work: 7 Steps for Defeating Bias In the Workplace*, she notes:

The Benefits of Diversity Dialogue include:

1. Increasing knowledge and understanding.
2. Reducing bias by minimizing and clarifying destructive rumors and misinformation.
3. Stifling the spread of misinformation.

Included in her book are some best practices for starting diversity dialogues. In her chapter, "Verbal Skills for Diversity Dialogue", she notes the importance of the following: (pgs. 166-172)

Employ Verbal and Vocal Modulation

This includes being prepared to lower your voice, and being

understated. Contrary to popular belief which is to be forceful and dramatic when we are having diversity dialogues, it is almost always more effective and accurate than if we chose the route of exaggeration.

As she notes, when we throw around words like "racist", "sexist", "homophobic", we are more likely to "weaken the impact of our message."

Avoid Dogmatic Language

When we use "dogmatic" or "absolute statements" such as: "it's the law", "that is what I was taught", "it's what the Bible says", in effect stop the dialogue from happening. As Thiederman suggests instead of using phrases like, "I was only kidding", or "You're too sensitive" when we are accused of bias we are making "dismissive phrases". Instead, by saying things like: "You have a different perspective, I'd like to hear more," or "Thanks for speaking up about how you

feel. We need more open discussions like this" creates the opportunity for dialogue to occur.

Maintain a High Standard

Try not to reduce yourself to the other person's level that is having an argument with you. There is a good chance that it will backfire. Taking this approach, may actually reinforce the bias that people already have, and remember you are in a workplace!

Strive for Creative Communication

Use respectful language but also speak the language that another person can relate to, by using examples that could resonate with them.

Really Listen

"...listening means to stay in the present - in the moment ---- listening only to the person in front of you."

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- Canadian Equivalency: Bachelor 's Degree in Civil Engineering assessed by Word Education Services- WES, September 15- 2008
- Professional Engineer Ontario (P ENG): Qualified and in process

Please contact: jecogam@hotmail.com.

Do You or One of Your Employees Need Help With Your English Pronunciation Skills?

HERE ARE SOME SIGNS THAT A PRONUNCIATION CLASS MAY BE WELL-SUITED FOR YOU:

- People tell you that they don't understand you when you speak.
- Errors are frequently made because of misunderstanding.
- Conflicts arise as a result of miscommunication -- the intonation that the speaker has used has been mistaken for anger, lack of interest, lack of self-confidence etc.
- Opportunities to speak in front of others are turned down because of feeling self-conscious.
- Increasing frustration on the part of the speaker, clients and co-workers because of misunderstanding.
- Your boss has identified that you need to improve your speaking skills to advance in your position.
- You are finding it difficult to get past a first job interview.
- You may not fit any of the categories mentioned above, but you feel that a pronunciation class will help you to refresh and recall particular mouth positions and sounds.

CONSIDER PRONUNCIATION CLASSES WITH DIVERSITY AT WORK!

These classes will help you to become more comfortable with North American English pronunciation and its usage. This is particularly the case if you are unsure of how and when to use it properly. You will learn the grammar rules to help you become a more confident and successful speaker. In addition, learning proper pronunciation will also help you learn the particular mouth positions needed in order to create the proper sounds. The classes suit everyone, and are given in a warm and friendly atmosphere at a pace that will meet your needs, make you feel relaxed and support you throughout the course.

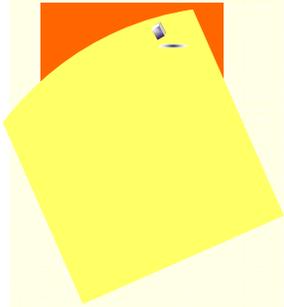
Investing in your verbal communication skills can lead to: improved self-confidence; obtaining and retaining a job; and widening your customer base. Give yourself or your employees the gift of clearer pronunciation.

Call us today and have your name placed on a list for public classes in London and Toronto. Ask us about our onsite classes for a group of your employees.

CLASSES ARE STARTING THIS FALL !



Ask the Consultant



Dear Ask the Diversity Consultant:

Dear Ask the Consultant:

I am in the process of evaluating the managers in my department and I want to include some diversity competencies within their performance appraisal. What are some of the actions I should be looking for?

Pamela K., Lethbridge AB

Dear Pamela:

You are right to note the importance of evaluating managers on their ability to work in a diverse workplace. It is one thing to say that we value it, but until we hold management and staff accountable for meeting some diversity and inclusion goals, we cannot expect anyone to take it too seriously.

Here are just a few ideas to consider when evaluating the manager. You can ask yourself whether they have been involved in these activities or others:

- Hiring and retaining and promoting individuals from diverse backgrounds.
- Coaching and grooming diverse individuals for advancement.
- Building cohesive, productive work teams from diverse staff.

- Resolving diversity-related conflicts between staff members.
- Maintaining a low rate of harassment, bias and discrimination complaints.
- Developing staff through delegation.
- Learning about the cultural norms and values of employees.
- Helping new employees acculturate into the organization's norms.
- Planning and leading effective meetings with diverse staff.

Adding metrics to these activities will make the evaluation process even more effective.

The Diversity Consultant

Did You Know that ?

Diversity At Work :

- Conducts cultural competency assessments.
 - Provides ethnic marketing.
 - Does training in international business etiquette and social customs.
 - Helps build business partnerships between mainstream and aboriginal communities.
 - Assists you to start up and trouble-shoot your diversity committee.
 - Provides elocution classes for foreign trained professionals.
 - Develops diversity strategic plans
- and More ...



Diversity at Work
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