



When Diversity Is Not Just a Workshop

By Lee Mun Wah

If you're wondering how diversity is viewed and experienced at your workplace, here are some essential questions to ask:

- Do folks who work here feel appreciated for their contributions? If not, how are they affected?
- Do they feel understood when they voice their opinions? Is there a sense of curiosity?
- Do they feel believed when they share the truth? Are folks supportive and empathetic?
- Do they feel there is a willingness to take responsibility by their leaders?
- Do they feel that 'real change' is possible when issues and concerns arise, or do they fear reprisals, being labeled 'trouble makers' or 'overly sensitive'?
- Do they feel that conflicts are handled with transparency and fairness?
- Do they feel that decisions are made after much discussion and feedback from those who are affected? Does everyone leave feeling heard, validated, and acknowledged for their perceptions and experiences?

When all of the above occurs:

- * Trust is established
- * A relationship based on mutual understanding is created
- * A belief that *everyone* is in this together and that there is also mutual accountability
- * A belief that what everyone brings is valuable and integral to the success of this agency/company/institution
- * That who they are is just as valuable as what they can do
- * That their differences are just as valuable as their similarities (which is often about imitating those in charge and leaving the best parts of themselves at the door)
- * That their emotional wellbeing and sense of safety are important to this institution

In short, diversity is more than just about representation, holiday celebrations, foods, dances, reading a book or attending an occasional diversity workshop. Diversity is about creating a sense of family and connection, authentic relationships based on trust, being honored and valued and embraced for all of who you are.

In other words, your mission statement should not just be a mission, but a reality in the minds and hearts of everyone who works there. When that happens, diversity is not just being honored, but practiced.