

## ADDRESSING diversity in career development

*As a result of demographic trends, the workforce is becoming increasingly diverse. The Society for Human Resource Management states that these are some of the trends organizations may face:*

- An aging population – greater generational diversity;
- Growth of Hispanic/Latino population;
- Increased immigration;
- Changing family structure;
- Increased religious diversity; and
- Higher number of people with disabilities.

*These trends will affect the career development process. People approach career development from different perspectives. Therefore, in order to meet the rising demand to create a high performing workplace culture, it will be a good business strategy that every employee feels he/she has equal access to career development.*

*One demographic group will no longer dominate the workplace. It will reflect the cultural pluralism existing within society. Managers, coaching employees in the career development process must develop the essential multicultural knowledge, skills, and awareness for conducting culturally appropriate career discussions. Traditional approaches used in career development may not be appropriate for assisting member of diverse groups. There is still ample evidence to suggest that women, people of color, persons with disabilities, gay men, lesbian women, and transgendered persons continue to encounter tremendous obstacles in their career development. Career development interventions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must be re-conceptualized to more adequately meet the career development needs of the members of an increasingly diverse society ((Arbona, 1990; Leong, 1986) Niles & Harris-Bowlsby, 2005).*

*Despite the passing and enforcement of laws prohibiting discrimination in the workplace, statistics still show that people of color, individuals with disabilities, women and gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered (GLBT) continue to experience discriminatory practices in the workplace. There is also a lack of mentors and role models.*

In the United States a dominant career-related belief is that the individual controls his or her own career destiny. Although individual control clearly plays a vital role, control is exerted within a context that varies relative to the degree to which it provides, support for a person's career aspirations. Clearly, factors such

as racism, sexism, socioeconomic status, ageism, and heterosexism constrain access to occupational opportunities for many people. (Niles & Harris- Bowsby, 2005)

*Niles and Harris-Bowsbey in their book, Career Development Interventions in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Second Edition, give some guidelines on how to work effectively with diverse individuals in the career development process. The following suggestions have been adapted from their guidelines.*

## **SOME** ways to effectively deal with diversity in career development:

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- Be aware of your attitudes and values. Understand how your own attitudes and values may interact with an employee's attitudes and values. Work to ensure that your internal frames of reference do not form roadblocks to successfully coaching your employees.
- Understand cultural context. Understand that we are each first and foremost individuals and only secondarily representations of our specific immediate and distal cultural contexts.
- Understand how experiences with racist, sexist, homophobic, classist, ageist, and discriminatory practices toward persons who are disabled influence an employee's career development.
- Provide experiential opportunities, information resources, mentoring opportunities and other activities relevant to persons from diverse groups.
- Research information on career development that applies to diverse groups.

*Although all of the previous suggestions apply to the groups below, there are a couple of suggestions targeted at specific groups.*

### **WOMEN** and people of color

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- Be aware of focusing women and people of color on stereotypical job and occupations and those jobs and occupations that are lower-paid and lesser skilled.
- Be aware of the "glass ceiling" syndrome.
- Understand how they bring the impact of their job experiences with them to the career planning process.

## GAY, lesbians, bisexual and transsexual (GLBT)

- Take personal inventory of ways in which subtle or unconscious biases may influence coaching your employee.
- Help employees find mentoring programs with gay/lesbian mentors.
- Arrange career-shadowing opportunities with gay/lesbian workers.

There is little research investigating the career development of gay, lesbian and bi-sexual people. Those who have conducted research say some career issues experienced by GLBT employees are sexual identity disclosure and management, work discrimination, and discrimination coping strategies. It is stated that providing career coaching for GLBT employees may not be easy for some managers due to social issues, internalized homophobia, employment discrimination, and so on. However, it is critically important for employers to develop the awareness, knowledge and skills necessary to competently assist sexual minorities in the career development process.

## PEOPLE with disabilities

- Know federal and state legislation, guidelines and policies applicable to persons with disabilities.
- Know characteristics of different types of disabilities, their causes, and their likely effects upon work behavior.
- Become aware of opportunities available for persons with different types of skills and different types of challenges.
- Know the essential employability skills, the availability of training programs as well as occupational and educational opportunities.
- Be aware of ways to work effectively with other specialist to facilitate a comprehensive approach to career exploration, career preparation, and career placement of persons with disabilities.
- Become familiar with examples of job redesign that employers use to accommodate the capabilities and/or functional limitations for persons with various types of disability.
- Be aware of the effects of social stigma, labeling and stereotyping on the self-concept of persons with disabilities.

Persons with disabilities encounter specific obstacles in their career development that are often due to a lack of awareness and sensitivity on the part of employers. Many employers adhere to the false (and stereotypical) beliefs that persons with disabilities will be absent more often, less productive, and less invested in their career development. Managers should obtain knowledge and develop skills for adequately addressing the career concerns of persons with disabilities.

*Reference: Career Development Interventions in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Second Edition*, Niles, Spencer G. and Harris-Bowlsbey, JoAnn, Pearson Education, Inc., 2005.

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