

Introduction

Diversity programs and initiatives have been administered for decades. However, we still struggle with many of the same equity and inclusion issues today that we have faced for years. In many ways, diversity has been a paradox in society. As we have experienced increasing “diversity” around the globe, we have also witnessed trends of growing disparity between peoples and cultures.

Often, it is suggested that we are not putting forth the proper attention and effort to rectify known diversity issues and problems. This criticism has some merit. However, it does not explain the enormous efforts made over the years to embrace diversity, but still have fallen short. Is it possible that our diversity efforts are misguided; that many of the efforts employed cannot be sustained over time?

This newsletter series is an introduction to a new paradigm in our approach to diversity and inclusion. My goal is to raise awareness to potential downfalls of current methodologies and make a case for new methods that are sustainable. This initial newsletter poses questions that don’t generally get asked of diversity advocates and champions. Each subsequent newsletter will pose new questions. By exploring these questions, we should gain a new perspective on diversity and inclusion issues to be addressed. As we add new thinking to our understanding of diversity issues, we can illuminate new ways to address long-standing concerns.

My first questions ponder the human condition and barriers to diversity and inclusion, “Would an end to racism, sexism and related phobias end our inhumanity toward one another; would it end human conflict? If the world was homogeneous, would human conflict dissipate?” If we could unequivocally answer ‘Yes’ to these questions, it would suggest that “isms” and phobias are underlying barriers to humans’ acceptance of one another. However, we all have examples of human conflict with others perceived to be like us; often in relationships with persons we care about deeply and deem close.

Consequently, this suggests that we need to identify and engage underlying issues that impact acceptance and inclusion. If our society is to overcome issues related to diversity and inclusion, transformative work must be accomplished at these base denominators.

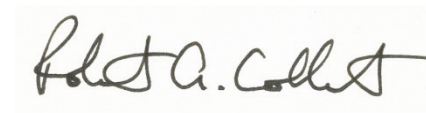
One key aspect of my diversity approach is that diversity is about change – things are different; they are not the same. Human beings struggle with change: from weather changes to variances in our daily routines. This unpredictability can be uncomfortable. More importantly, our personal growth and development also precipitate change and varying degrees of discomfort. As we come face to face with differences, these challenges can limit our ability to cultivate diversity and inclusion.

If we are to embrace diverse peoples, we must better understand our natural human barriers and develop approaches and tools that mitigate them. One key guideline of my diversity approach is to provide safeguards that overcome basic human nature, similar to the use of icebreakers at social events. Such tools are used to gently move people beyond their protective behaviors to embrace one another.

I will close with two primary thoughts. Our ability to understand and reduce the barriers native to our human condition is key to moving forward on the path of diversity and inclusion. As diversity leaders who facilitate growth and development, it is important to recognize our own vulnerabilities to change - this allows us to better guide sustainable diversity efforts.

Should you have questions or comments regarding this newsletter, please contact me. If you find my thoughts intriguing and would like to hear more about my approach and methods, I welcome your inquiries.

I will continue to send newsletters on a bi-monthly basis. I hope you find them useful in your thinking and approach to diversity and inclusion. If you would like someone added to my distribution list or want to unsubscribe for future additions, please reply to my e-mail address.



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Presenter and workshop facilitator:

Robert Colbert has over 30 years of experience in the corporate world. He began his career in public accounting, continued into the private sector of Corporate America, moved into the non-profit sector, and subsequently became a business consultant. During his career, he's had assignments in audit, finance, corporate development, technical sales, marketing and non-profit operations. His educational credentials include a BA from Minnesota State University, Mankato and an MBA from the University of Minnesota Carlson School of Management. He is also a CPA and holder of

a U.S. patent. In addition, he teaches tai chi in the Minneapolis community and currently serves on two non-profit boards: Cammack Marshall Fund for Children, and Freedom Train, Inc. His approach to diversity was developed and honed from experiences he and many others faced during their time in the private and non-profit sectors. His basic premise is that human beings struggle with change and variation; challenges that impede our ability to accept and value one another. To build sustainable diversity, our challenge is to find answers to an overlooked question, "How do we compensate for the human condition as it contends with change and variation."