

## **Barriers**

There seems to be widespread agreement that a more diverse office environment is a more productive office and environment. There is no doubt that the general population is growing more diverse. So why is it that our office environments in the precast industry do not appear to naturally reflect the diversity of our society? In order to grow our companies and expand our market share, the industry should implement measures to improve diversity and inclusivity. Let us take a moment to look at some subtle, and most likely unconscious, barriers to this natural growth to diversity:

### **Biased Mentoring**

Formal mentoring is common in most industries and usually involves a matched pair through an intentional program. However, informal mentoring, where a senior leader will invest in guiding the career development, is much more common. This is essential for the legacy of any industry because it is the act of passing on the core knowledge base to the next generation. Unfortunately, for this mentoring to occur, senior leaders often invest in a junior colleague that reminds them of a younger version of themselves. It can be much more difficult for a senior leader to choose to mentor a junior colleague that is not of the same sex or the same race - any number of differences - because they cannot relate to this junior colleague's experiences or background. In this way there is a natural bias against diversity.

### **Acceptance and Respect**

Perhaps the most prevalent barrier to workplace diversity is a lack of acceptance. It is necessary for employers and co-workers to accept and respect differences between each other. This acceptance will encourage the sharing of ideas that is essential to an effective workplace. Stereotypes and prejudice discourage positive attitudes and thus are corrosive to morale and productivity. It is important for all co-workers, particularly supervisors, to accept, respect, and be sensitive to the cultural differences of their new employees. We need to avoid the "I had no idea this was insensitive" attitude to accept disrespect. This can only be accomplished through a willingness to learn about the experiences of others.

### **Lack of Vision in your organization**

Employees can be very skeptical to the benefits of diversity to the well-being of the company. There are few among us that are so set in their ways that they will never accept how an initiative to improve diversity can benefit the company. I believe that most of us are open to this discussion, just not sure where to start. Leadership must be able to explain the "why" prior to any meaningful progress to be made with diversity and inclusion. If employees see a new diversity program as another chore with dubious benefits, this will doom even the best of intentions. Leadership needs to not treat diversity and inclusion as just another compliance issue to be addressed with a series of disconnected activities. A lack of consistent leadership commitment can lead to the good intent of any program falling short of meaningful action.

### **Generation Gap**

A generation gap can be a barrier to a diverse workplace culture. Younger generations are bringing changes to workplace culture that older generations may not look upon as favorable. It is important that social circles in the workplace attempt to bridge the generation gap to prevent some team members being left out and more importantly- to prevent uncooperative factions from forming. There will always be resistance to change. It is important for leadership to articulate diversity as positive change, yet this is a barrier to be overcome at the employee level. Reaching out to others to hear their story is the first step in inclusion. As with almost any office issue, open lines of communication are the key to bridging the generation gap and bringing the social circles together.

This was a look at a few common barriers to diversity and inclusivity. If your office is struggling to fulfill a plan of diversity, ask yourself if any of these barriers apply. Or try to identify the barriers preventing your office environment from moving forward. By addressing these barriers, you will find that your office environment will reap the benefits of a more diverse and inclusive workplace.

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