

# *101 Actions You Can Take to Value And Manage Diversity*

by Julie O'Mara

## **INTRODUCTION**

*101 Actions* frames the complex, challenging issues of valuing and managing diversity and transforms them into practical, useful actions. As each of us accomplishes the actions, we grow in our ability to understand and impact valuing and managing diversity.

The definition of diversity and managing diversity used for these actions is a broad definition based on the primary and secondary dimensions of diversity from Judy B. Rosener's and Marilyn Loden's work.

Some of the actions offer opportunities to learn by examining our actions, thoughts, and feelings. Most involve interacting with others. Some produce tangible products or events.

Read all of them before you decide what to do. Use these action ideas to stimulate you to think of more actions. Alter the actions so they are compatible with your environment and are, therefore, achievable.

Start by selecting three actions and focus on accomplishing them first. Then continue to add more actions as you strive to value and manage diversity.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Many of these ideas came from others—from employees and managers who have asked, “What can I do?” and then have created lists of actions they can take; from the growing body of literature on workforce diversity; and from many people I have interacted with over the years.

## **FOR ALL EMPLOYEES, INCLUDING MANAGERS**

- 1.** Attend diversity-awareness workshops and share what you learn with others. Do this on your own time as well as during work time.
- 2.** Increase team synergy by regarding differences as strengths. Differences can strengthen a team by adding additional skills, knowledge, points of view, values, and abilities. Use these differences to identify more effective ways of operating. This can improve productivity.
- 3.** Identify and be aware of your biases, assumptions, and prejudices. Consider how they may affect your attitude and behaviors at work. Recognize that prejudice is often subtle. It is quite natural to make assumptions and to possess biases toward others. When you know you'll be in a challenging situation, plan to question your biases and perhaps react differently than your feelings might dictate.
- 4.** Accept opportunities to participate in diversity-related focus groups, discussion groups, and employee surveys. Contribute your ideas.
- 5.** Talk with your manager or others in your organization if you need assistance with child or elder care, or time off for religious holidays or other family issues. Be prepared to offer suggestions to help your organization meet your needs regarding this assistance. Be flexible and willing to compromise when necessary to get your needs met.
- 6.** Take a course on learning how to listen more effectively to understand how people hear things differently. Use your enhanced ability to listen effectively, especially with people who may have views different from yours. A useful technique is to listen to each individual "as if they are wise."
- 7.** Start a collection of quotes related to valuing and managing diversity and display it in your office.
- 8.** Attend community cultural events, such as ethnic dance festivals, celebrations, fairs, lectures, movies, and plays. Listen to guest speakers on multicultural and diversity issues. Invite others to go with you. Share your appreciation for other cultures and your learning from these events with others.
- 9.** Socialize with persons who are different from you. Make these contacts on and off the job. You may find that you share common interests in sports, business, movies and plays, or cooking.
- 10.** Encourage your organization to establish a library of diversity-related books, articles, and audio and video tapes. Use it frequently and encourage others to do so, too. Contribute articles, periodicals, and publications to the library so others can benefit from your "finds." Start a reading group and share your learning regularly.

11. Understand clearly what is meant by “diversity,” “managing diversity,” and learn the language of diversity. In most organizations, diversity refers to the differences of people. Such differences include gender, race, sexual orientation, abilities and disabilities, thinking styles, and approaches to work. Managing diversity refers to proactive programs and change processes that address issues created by differences. Learn the meaning of the terms race, assimilation, prejudice, unearned privilege, internalize oppression, etc. Looking them up in the dictionary or searching on the internet, are places to start, but don’t stop there.
12. Strive to “get it.” One of the most frequent statements made by employees talking about diversity in organizations is that some people “just don’t get it.” They hear others not believing that some employees may be treated differently. If you think you may not “get it,” pursue additional education. Ask questions of people who are different from you. Ask them what it is you “don’t get.” Listen to others as they describe diversity issues. Seek clarification, rather than making hasty judgments.
13. Offer to coordinate or participate in an event that educates others about a specific diversity topic or view.
14. Learn another language or study another culture. Obtain references and resources from your company library, community library, local colleges, universities, or private companies. Start a foreign language study group with members of your organization as teachers. Seek opportunities to share this knowledge.
15. Use your organization’s suggestion system to offer your ideas on diversity.
16. Influence the managers of your cafeteria to offer vegetarian, ethnic, and kosher choices. An expanded menu offers additional choices for persons who regularly eat a certain type of food, and it helps others become more familiar with a culture through its food.
17. Read about cross-cultural communication, sexual orientation, and other diversity issues and apply this knowledge as you communicate with others. Sources include newspapers, business magazines, books, etc. When reading non-business books, consider selecting those that discuss diversity-related issues. Examples are *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* by Dee Brown, *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan, *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, and *Breaking the Surface* by Greg Lougainis. Discuss with others the insights you gain.
18. Learn as much as possible about what happened before taking a stand on news accounts of events related to diversity. Sometimes news accounts present a one-sided view. Strive to learn other views. Discuss others’ perceptions (especially those different from yours) to help you form an opinion.

- 19.** Influence your facilities manager to place ethnic art in your offices and incorporate the “arts” as part of an overall strategy on managing diversity. Include art by persons different in ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and other differences.
- 20.** Post non-offensive diversity-related cartoons from newspapers and magazines on office walls, bulletin boards, etc., and use them to start conversations about diversity issues. Indicate the source of the cartoon. Get permission in writing from the copyright holder if you wish to make copies or use as overheads or slides in meetings.
- 21.** Participate in employee advocacy groups or networks that focus on developing women, people of color, older workers, men’s support groups, gays/lesbians/bisexuals/transgendered individuals, or others. If your organization doesn’t have such a group, ask Human Resources, your diversity department, or management how to start one.
- 22.** Take a personal stand against racial or sexual jokes and storytelling. Don’t tell them yourself and don’t participate or laugh at such jokes or stories told by others. Encourage coworkers to refrain from participating in joke telling by explaining the personal and legal implications on the workplace and the workers. If you enjoy telling jokes, tell jokes that are not sexist, not racist, and that don’t belittle others.
- 23.** Suggest captioning of organization videos and presentations for deaf or hard-of-hearing persons.
- 24.** Practice using assertive techniques to express your support of diversity. For example, learn effective assertive techniques to suggest others stop using the word “girls” when referring to women in the workplace, to curtail white male bashing, or to stop negative and stereotypical comments about GLBT persons. Generally, assertive—not aggressive—techniques are the most effective for expressing your wants, needs, and ideas. Read about or take a course on assertiveness.
- 25.** Learn more about the following specific issues of diversity—assimilation, melting pot versus “salad bowl,” oppression, subtle racism, ethnocentrism, and sexism—through reading, training, and discussion.
- 26.** Strive to use terminology that is the most agreeable in your organization. Determine which is most preferred: “hard-of-hearing” or “hearing impaired,” “black” or “African-American,” “people of color” or “minority,” “sexual orientation” or “sexual preference,” and so forth. Often there is no easy answer. However, most persons appreciate those who strive to use the most acceptable terminology.
- 27.** Write and speak in language that is non-sexist and non-racist. Sometimes use “she” instead of “he” in written and oral communications, including videos and advertising. When using fictitious names in writing or speaking, use names from various cultures. Keep in mind the need to counter stereotypes in writing and speech. Avoid using names from one ethnic

group to describe good performers and names from another group to describe poor performers. Be sure you are sensitive and vary the use of names.

- 28.** Encourage your office to celebrate and decorate for many cultural events and holidays, not just for traditional U.S. holidays, such as Christmas. Learn your organization's policy regarding celebrating religious holidays.
- 29.** Influence a "Bring Your Children to Work" day in which workers bring their children or grandchildren to the office to learn about careers. Encourage employees without children to bring nieces, nephews, younger sisters or brothers, or another child.
- 30.** Learn how to use Statewide Relay Service numbers (contact your local phone company) when calling deaf or hard-of-hearing persons.
- 31.** Learn more about the issues related to GLBT persons (gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered persons) in the workplace. Understand your organization's policy related to these issues. If your organization does not already have domestic partner benefits, consider advocating for those benefits.
- 32.** Work with elementary, middle, and high schools to incorporate diversity issues into their curriculum—especially as they relate to the workplace.
- 33.** Create opportunities for discussions with others about diversity. Bring the topic up in one-on-one conversations, meetings, and social activities. That practice enables you to share your views and to learn those of others.
- 34.** Assess your self-esteem level. If it's not as high as you'd like, participate in personal growth workshops to help you develop a stronger sense of self-esteem. It's difficult to appreciate, respect, and value others if you don't feel good about yourself.
- 35.** Participate enthusiastically in the celebration of someone else's heritage (Black History Month, Hanukkah, Cinco de Mayo, etc.), or attend a religious service or event different from yours.
- 36.** Offer other perspectives to help others think "outside of the box." This can help expand an individual's thinking about diversity-related challenges and may lead to a valuing of diversity.
- 37.** Coach upper management and members of your organization's Board of Directors on being authentic on diversity issues and on appropriate behaviors for public profile around diversity issues. Many executives enjoy telling personal stories and will share their experiences related to diversity. Coach them so they avoid sounding elitist, which can further separate and counter the objective of a story. For example, a woman executive telling a story about feeling different as the only woman in a group might want to avoid including a reference to being at the White House or a prestigious academic institution with

the group. Many people who might otherwise relate to her story about being different would consider it bragging.

- 38.** Have lunch or coffee once a week with a person different from you in race, age, department, education or discipline, level, etc. and so forth.
- 39.** Bring a guest to the next meeting or event of an advocacy or support group or network in your organization. That guest may be someone similar to or different from others in the group.
- 40.** Encourage others to contribute to their fullest potential as a means to countering stereotyping about qualifications.
- 41.** Learn to value differences by thinking about times in your life when you have felt different. For example, you may have been a nongolfer in a group of golfers, a nonacademic in a group of academics, a parent in a group of nonparents. You may have gone to a different church or held a different political view, or had a physical characteristic (height or weight, for instance) that was different. Recalling these experiences and feelings can help you understand the difficulties others have in being different and to keep you focused on creating a culture in your organization that values the differences.
- 42.** Agree as a work group to watch a television show on different lifestyles and topics related to diversity. Discuss this show the next day at a staff meeting or over lunch or coffee.
- 43.** Use a “visual language” of words, pictures and shapes when offering job aids or other materials to be used by a wide audience. This “visual language” helps satisfy a diversity of learning styles.

## **FOR MANAGERS AND EXECUTIVES**

- 44.** Attend diversity workshops that focus specifically on managing diversity. It’s best to do this after you have attended a workshop on diversity awareness. Recommend these workshops to others. Report what you have learned to the rest of your department. Implement the ideas you have learned.
- 45.** Set objectives and performance standards, but don’t dictate ways to achieve them. People with various problem-solving styles will enrich the results. For example, those with disabilities may have learned a different way to accomplish something.
- 46.** Look for creative ways such as posters, special memos, web sites, and logos to communicate your ideas about diversity. Find ways to incorporate your ideas as part of your everyday work and advise others on ways to put the ideas into practice.

- 47.** Set up a mentoring program for those in your department who want a mentor. Mentor someone of a different race, gender, age group, or personality. Learn about the various types of mentoring: formal, informal, or facilitated.
- 48.** Show a videotape on diversity at a meeting. Facilitate a discussion following the videotape. Be sure you have previewed the video and are knowledgeable about the contents. Also be sure to allow enough time to have a quality discussion.
- 49.** Get involved in recruiting efforts in your department. Help develop strategies for increasing the number of women, people of color, people of different ages, persons with disabilities, and those whose lifestyles differ from the traditional employee background.
- 50.** Learn and communicate the differences among EEO, Affirmative Action, Sexual Harassment, and Managing Diversity. Communicate these distinctions to others.
- 51.** Consider women, people of color, and others who are different from the traditional employee background for leadership and managerial positions. Ask them to take your place while you travel or are on vacation, to represent you at a meeting or conference, to make presentations, nominate them for task forces, and so forth. Be creative in identifying opportunities for your employees to demonstrate their potential.
- 52.** Work with your employees to develop career plans. Support and reward your employees in their own career development and outreach education efforts. Model this process by having a career plan yourself.
- 53.** Manage individuals with flexibility. The phrase “one size fits all” or procedures that treat everyone the same may have worked in the past, but often don’t work with today’s workforce, which wants to be treated equitably, but not the same. For example, some employees want time off, while others prefer money or an opportunity to make a presentation for a job well done. Provide choices rather than offer the same reward to all.
- 54.** Study the Americans With Disabilities Act and talk with your Human Resources Department and others about how you can help achieve the goals of the Act.
- 55.** Work with your Human Resources Department to outreach for job candidates in areas your organization has not traditionally used, such as colleges when members of specific ethnic groups make up a significant percentage of the student body, and various associations such as theater groups, sports, clubs, disability associations, etc.
- 56.** Learn to give feedback in a way that recognizes different cultures and styles.
- 57.** Invite a member of your organization’s diversity department or committee to address your department. If your organization doesn’t have a diversity department, strive to get one started.

- 58.** Coach other managers in your organization to learn more about diversity and become managers who model valuing and managing diversity. Share this list of 101 Actions with them and encourage them to implement as many actions as they can.
- 59.** Avoid a “quick fix” when addressing diversity issues. Activities such as promoting women and people of color into high-level positions and establishing training programs help individuals begin a process of valuing and managing diversity. While those are important steps and viable outcomes, they are not the ultimate goal of a managing diversity effort. The ultimate goal needs to be creating a respectful environment so employees can contribute to their full potential and the organization’s business goals are met.
- 60.** Exert influence on advertising and internal communication vehicles to avoid stereotyping and to advocate the principles of diversity.
- 61.** Model the managing diversity behaviors advocated by your organization. If diversity behaviors or expectations aren’t developed, influence others to create them. Being clear on the expected behaviors helps everyone know what to do. Do not say one thing publicly and another informally. For example, do not publicly support your organization’s stance against sexual harassment and then tell sexist jokes—even if only to a select few personal friends at work.
- 62.** Ensure that a declaration about diversity is included in your organization’s values or vision statement.
- 63.** Become proficient in the five skills needed to manage diversity. Strive to:
  - Empower others
  - Develop others
  - Value diversity
  - Work for change
  - Communicate responsibly
- 64.** Involve employees in decisions that until now have been made only by management. Strive to change the mindset that “employees aren’t paid to think.”
- 65.** Integrate diversity efforts with other change initiatives in your organization, such as high performance teams, customer service, empowerment processes, and employee involvement activities.
- 66.** Encourage the establishment of rewards and incentives to managers who do a good job of managing diversity. This includes setting diversity goals and being measured on the accomplishment of those goals.
- 67.** Build time to discuss diversity-related issues into some of your regularly scheduled meetings.



- 68.** Cite the major business advantages of managing diversity when making speeches and presentations. Managing diversity:
  - Adds a competitive advantage to recruiting and retention
  - Improves productivity, quality, teamwork, creativity, and job satisfaction
  - Enhances customer service and marketing
  - Potentially reduces the legal liabilities of discrimination and sexual harassment
  - Contributes to a positive organizational image
- 69.** During a presentation or speech, share the spotlight with others on your staff, especially with those who are visibly different from you.
- 70.** Learn how to build trust. Become comfortable sharing information about yourself, even if your upbringing or culture makes it difficult to do so. Do what you say you will do. If you are unable to do what you promise, explain the reasons.
- 71.** Identify best practices organizations that are managing diversity effectively. Learn what they are doing to value and manage diversity. Share your ideas and look for ways to partner your efforts with theirs. Build diversity alliances.
- 72.** Conduct brown-bag sessions or forums attended by small groups (five to six persons) for the purpose of open discussion of diversity issues. Set the mood for sharing by emphasizing both the organization's position and your personal thoughts, as well as by sharing your feelings and concerns.
- 73.** Recommend development of a brochure that describes your organization's position on diversity and gives useful ideas about how to value and manage diversity. However, be sure it is legitimately tied to overall strategy and organizational values and isn't just "lip service."
- 74.** Form pairs or teams of people who are different in race, gender, or other visible differences to co-present, co-lead, or co-train. Coach them in how to work collaboratively. Great teamwork promotes the managing and valuing of differences. Provide other teamwork opportunities for your work groups, too.
- 75.** Create developmental assignments and distribute those equitably. Before making decisions, however, ask your employees what assignments they would be interested in. Clarify your expectations.
- 76.** Establish a diversity council or task force comprised of persons of different levels, disciplines, and other categories of diversity. Establish a climate of empowerment so the group can recommend organizational changes necessary to support a culture that is "diversity-friendly." Publicize the group's successes.
- 77.** Remember as you strive to objectively measure performance that some individuals experience barriers to their performance. These barriers, such as biases and prejudice, may reduce an

individual's ability to perform. Measures that are strictly performance-based can, and should, be used after the barriers to performance have been reduced or eliminated.

- 78.** Weave diversity measures into climate and attitude surveys. These measures include positive movement in employees' opinions on openness, trust, willingness of management to listen to employee needs and suggestions, inclusion in problem-solving, career opportunities, and so forth.
- 79.** Identify and hold managers and employees accountable for exhibiting behaviors that contribute to achieving diversity objectives.
- 80.** Encourage the formation of employee groups to assist persons who are different from the dominant organization culture in networking, learning the ropes of the organization, and advocating various aspects of diversity. These groups are often called Networks, Support Groups, Affinity Groups, or Advocacy Groups.
- 81.** Create scholarships and internship programs that encourage the participation of nontraditional persons in your organization.
- 82.** Address work and family issues, such as child and eldercare, time off for family reasons, flex-time, job sharing, and part-time work. Reduce the number of meetings held after hours. Investigate childcare needs and develop strategies to address them.
- 83.** Involve people who are not part of the dominant culture in succession planning and promotion sessions, especially when women and people of color are part of the candidate pool.
- 84.** Examine your assumptions about whether or not a particular person might be interested in an assignment. Sometimes we assume that single parents, people highly involved in the community, and others may not want to take on additional work or travel. Or we assume that those who are younger and single are eager to take on additional work or travel. Or we assume that men do not have childcare responsibilities. Give individuals an opportunity to say "yes" or "no" to assignments. Don't make decisions for your employees.
- 85.** Ensure that your management style reflects acceptance of healthy disagreement and takes advantage of the diverse opinions of others.
- 86.** Ban any organization function held in clubs or restaurants that restrict membership of certain racial, gender, or religious groups.
- 87.** Think ahead about the needs of your audience when making or showing organization videos or holding presentations. Is an interpreter for the deaf useful? Are microphones in the audience (for questions) adequately positioned for those in wheelchairs?
- 88.** Learn to effectively interview people from cultures different from yours.

- 89.** Assess your building for access to persons with disabilities. Are there ramps, wide entrances, available rooms? Are restroom facilities including mirrors, sinks, towels available to handicapped employees? Is the salad bar or buffet accessible to wheel chair users? Do emergency evacuation procedures take into account the special needs, if any, of employees with disabilities? Is technology accessible to all?
- 90.** Consider the whole picture when addressing diversity in your organization. A coordinated systems approach will make your efforts all the more effective. The whole picture includes:
  - Behaviors and skills
  - Policies and procedures
  - Systems, such as performance management and compensation
  - Customized training of all levels of employees
- 91.** Subscribe to one or more newsletters and magazines on diversity and circulate them to others in your organization.
- 92.** Encourage conference planners to broaden their recruitment of visibly diverse speakers, exhibitors, and participants.
- 93.** Learn to distinguish between a performance issue and one that may be based on diversity. Honestly assess why you view the performance of each person the way you do.
- 94.** Work to accommodate requests for flexibility. If you can't accommodate such a request honestly and sympathetically explain why. If you have a tendency to respond (or think about responding) to requests for flexibility with a "you-should-be-glad-you-have-a-job" attitude, stop before you say anything. With such an attitude you'll likely lower productivity, morale, and profits.
- 95.** Initiate ongoing focus group discussions to get feedback and new ideas on what your organization can do to value and manage diversity.
- 96.** Ask your employees, "How do you feel you are treated here?" or "What can I be doing to help you achieve your goals?" Be honest about what you can and can't do. Brainstorm ideas to minimize the "can't do's."
- 97.** Observe the social interactions of your work group to determine if some of your employees feel excluded from these events. Find out why and strive to resolve these issues.
- 98.** Establish a diversity bulletin board or discussion group on your organization's electronic mail system. Set ground rules for this discussion group.
- 99.** Review your recognition practices and programs to ensure that diversity is valued and "recognized" and that the practices include all employees.

**100.** When rewarding and recognizing teams, highlight areas of difference, as well as areas of similarities, that enabled the team to achieve its goals.

**101.** Produce a video that describes your organization's approach to managing diversity. Create a leader's guide to help managers and employees use the video effectively.

## **ACTION PLAN**

Use this section to document your commitment. Be specific on the actions you will take.

*Three actions I will take:*

### **ACTION #1**

Specifically I will do the following (please give dates that each task will be started and completed):

I will have accomplished this action item when:

### **ACTION #2**

Specifically I will do the following (please give dates that each task will be started and completed):

I will have accomplished this action item when:

### **ACTION #3**

Specifically I will do the following (please give dates that each task will be started and completed):

I will have accomplished this action item when: