

## **If You Are Still Using The Word Disruptive You're Already Late and So 2008!!**

by

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### **The Problem**

Although using the new business code word(s) of the day ostensibly makes you appear topical, trendy and oh so in the know. In fact, in my opinion, all it does is identify you as one more sheep in the global herd. This, I submit, is the case for use of the term disruptive in today's work world. Being disruptive in action, thought or deed in today's workplace will not get you, hired or promoted. Instead it can get you not hired, fired or demoted. Notwithstanding what you read in current popular and business literature regarding utilizing the disruptive approach or what you hear when listening to the knowing pronouncements of pseudo expert talking heads on the various TV shows. The proposition that management wants creative, innovative and disruptive employees on the team is a flat out non-starter.

If you believe what you read and hear as it relates to adopting the disruptive approach keep in mind the realities of this romanticized view. If you are an employee who takes the disruptive approach, you may be viewed by many as someone unable to follow protocol or unable to work well with other team members. Questions will arise as to whether or not you can follow direction or are able to complete a task as ordered. The road to promotion, or even continued employment, becomes difficult and in many cases unattainable when the word gets out among the management cadre that you don't seem capable of "following the program, i.e., orders."

### **Managing A Disruptive Diverse Workforce**

If you are under thirty years old and take the disruptive approach the thought will be that you lack experience and seasoning and that you don't really understand how the game is played. You can expect to be hit with aspersions and accusations of workplace inattentiveness, carelessness, entitlement or downright laziness being floated around the company about you.

Oftentimes if you the disruptive staffer are female, non-white, over 55 or are an immigrant the issue of "fitting in" rears its ugly head. Private, and not so private, conversations between and among middle and senior management will be focused on your lack of commitment to the company's vision plan. In many cases the bulk of the workforce is not aware of the company's vision. Notwithstanding that fact, you will be held accountable for not knowing the Plan.

Both senior and middle management secretly pride themselves, and sometimes openly, on their ability to play the game and play it well. The business anthem for success among them is repeated time and time again with the business catechism "it is all about relationships." Everyone from the custodian to the CEO knows that this statement is one of the most worthless throw-away lines in business today. Many argue that what it is really about is legacy, privilege and entitlement. The real key to business success is having the inside track on what's about to go down before everybody else has a clue. My Dad, a small businessman, used to tell me that it's not who you know, but who knows you.

Most of us would not disagree with the statement that many folk obtain jobs and are promoted in them because of where they went to school, their family name or family contacts. I am not saying that these gifts should not be utilized; I am saying there is also a place for potential, opportunity and merit.

There is/should be a place where a person's gender, age, ethnicity, disability and nationality is seen as a possible boon and not an insurmountable barrier to workplace/workforce success. It has been said that people hire, promote and are most comfortable with others similar to them. This attitude flies directly in the face of inclusion, diversity and cultural competency. So how do you break this workplace behavior?

How about appealing to a sense of equity or fair-play? How about upper management mandating that all employees attend an annual diversity or cultural competency workshop? Maybe a "must view" webinar from the CEO stating his/her belief and support for tolerance, diversity and inclusion will do the trick? All of these approaches have been tried and to date there is no substantial data that supports that these well-meaning efforts had even a modicum of success.

How come? To begin with, a significant number of staff members view appeals for equity and fair-play as insulting and unfair to them. Most believe that they are not racist, sexist, ageist or anti-immigrant. The fact that some of their individual and institutional actions suggest that indeed they are racist, sexist, ageist and anti-immigrant falls on deaf ears. Many believe that they now live in a post-racial, non-sexist, non-ageist, pro-immigrant world, particularly in the workplace. Some see those who complain, file grievances or sue for discrimination as ungrateful whiners who are attempting to game the system. Despite the fact that empirical data supports the truth that although some progress has been made in some areas there is a huge amount of work to be done in this area in society and the workplace.

Second, employees regardless of age, gender, race or disability absolutely hate management mandates whether it is regarding inclusion, diversity or new policy changes about the annual Holiday party. A significant number of employees believe that management, primarily white males over 55, is very good at telling subordinate staff what they should do while they do whatever they want to do. There are countless examples of white male leadership, with guaranteed employment contracts and very little diversity in their ranks or on the Board of Directors, ordering the rank and file to embrace inclusion. These acts are also viewed by staff as an insult and a joke.

Well surely a heartfelt webinar from the CEO distributed to all employees voicing his/her support for inclusion will get the message across? High Tech is not High Touch! For many, this is just another PR attempt by leadership to "look good." This approach, in my opinion, is not disruptive but for many it is more of the same.

### **The Solution**

So if these efforts don't or won't work what's the solution? The suggested solution is simple and truly disruptive. However, it will take, on a continuous basis, time, energy and effort. Quite a few consultants and advisors have made a substantial amount of money designing and conducting diversity and cultural competency workshops. Many companies, large and small, have spent a substantial amount of money paying for the aforementioned services. However, when you take a giant results overview, despite these efforts, you will find whole industries where there are none or very few minorities, women, immigrants or the disabled in the workforce. You will find even less diversity in upper management or among members of the respective Board of Directors.

Actions To Be Taken

I am not suggesting that companies no longer use the services of consultants and advisors. However, I am suggesting that they “flip the script.” By that I mean instead of outsiders coming in and, in many cases, talking down to or at employees why not have leadership AND outside consultants jointly talk with employees regarding the systemic challenges the company faces as it addresses inclusion in a global marketplace.

- ✓ Educate staff regarding the reality that by identifying, training, nurturing and sustaining a diverse workforce it increases the company’s chances for continued success; develop analytics and metrics to support that contention. Data tells us that the world is becoming brown and feminine. These are current and potential customers.
- ✓ Recognize that these four components working in constant concert must be utilized:
  - Education
  - Communication
  - Collaboration
  - Accountability

Try something really disruptive – create and maintain an environment in which management is able to ask employees to talk about their concerns regarding the hiring, nurturing, promotion and employment of diverse personnel. Keeping it “real” gets to the heart of the matter. It will not be successful if staff does not trust management to allow them to be “honest” about their innermost feelings regarding diversity and inclusion. If there are overt or covert penalties for voicing their opinions there can be no real participation or collaboration. This employee input is very valuable in shaping an inclusion initiative that recognizes the concerns of the majority as it relates to interaction with additional and/or new diverse co-employees.

If management is successful in gaining and maintaining employee trust from both majority and diverse staff regarding this initiative the next challenge is asking staff for suggested solutions to the charge at hand. Very few employees, in many organizations, have ever been asked for their input regarding company solutions. Do not be surprised with the fact that everybody in the workplace has an agenda. That is to be expected and factored into the equation. Do not overlook the fact that many employees have experienced the obligatory request from management for employee input either at the current or past workplace(s). They have seen these requests go nowhere and quickly realized that management was not sincere with its request and they stopped offering suggestions.

Realize that there must be a business case for a disruptive diversity and inclusion initiative like any other company endeavor. It has to be well thought out and the organization must be able to articulate the business case both internally and externally. These questions must be asked and answered:

**QUESTIONS FOR THE BUSINESS CASE FOR AN INCLUSION INITIATIVE**

➔ How is this new Initiative helpful to the organization	➔ Are there timely and topical metrics to support this Initiative
➔ What are the benefits	➔ Have you communicated to staff the content and context of the Initiative
➔ What are the liabilities	➔ Did you seek continuous input from staff
➔ Who benefits	➔ Who is accountable for success or failure
➔ Who does not benefit	➔ What are the specific rewards for success; what are the penalties; i.e., who is accountable

Celebrate when indications suggest success. Most employees whether diverse or not benefit from guidance and advice from Mentors. Mentors may or may not be an employee's immediate supervisor or someone within the company. A suggested approach to in-house mentoring is to design and develop a formal or even an informal mentorship program wherein all employees are provided mentoring.

Recognize the Mentors when their respective Mentees are successful. One approach is to assign all new hires a Mentor. That Mentor is someone who is recognized by management, peers and staff alike for his/her expertise at performing his job at an exceptionally high level. S/he is rewarded with a two to three per cent bump in pay during the New Hire's Introductory Period (usually 90 to 120 days).

When or if the New Hire successfully completes the Introductory Period, the Department has a short Celebration Party to recognize the transition of the Hire from Introductory to Regular Status. The Mentor is recognized for mentoring the Hire. The two to three percent pay is removed from the Mentor's pay until s/he is assigned another New Hire.

For those Mentors who mentor Regular Status employees, their work is recognized through comments in their Annual Performance Evaluation and at the end of the year, they may be eligible for a small bonus or provided agreed to paid time off. This is a disruptive approach to employee development from all sides of the equation.

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### **Summary**

A true disruptive approach was suggested to address the palpable lack of diversity and inclusion in the current workplace. It is my opinion that this approach could be utilized in re-designing current wage and salary systems, annual performance evaluations, hiring, promotions and the like. Be truly disruptive by educating, developing and collaborating with your workforce regarding the steps, actions and approaches needed to outdistance the competition and surpass customer expectations with a diverse workforce that mirror's the global marketplace