



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Paving the Way for Multilingual Employees!

Creating multicultural workforces that empower the organization

Key Learnings

- Global organizations have created the indispensable multilingual workforce. Adapting to this new component is difficult but not impossible.
- By applying training methodologies and adept strategies, organizations can create a truly global workplace.

“Think like a wise man but communicate in the language of the people”-William Butler Yeats

A workforce challenge that plagues organizations world over is the quintessence of the new multilingual workforce. Experience however states that despite the verbal communication challenge - dealing with the multilingual workforce can be encouraging.

Food for thought!

Palazzo Foods a gourmet food company was launched in 2002. While the owner David Hodges was a teacher in English, the first ever trainee, Javier was a Mexican immigrant. Despite strong values and work knowledge communication proved difficult. Gesturing eased the situation and soon the two began to work in-sync.

Today, despite a Spanish speaking staff, the organization is doing very well. Basic practices in the kitchen of Palazzo Foods have helped Hodges overcome language barriers. For instance, instructions in the kitchen written in English and Spanish, an ‘online translation service’ and supplementary English lessons for the staff have minimized many impediments to success.

Figure this out!

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) predicts that by 2008, 41 percent of the nation’s 39 million workers will be members of minority groups

By 2050, minorities are expected to rise from one-fourth to one-half of the U.S. population.

The multilingual economy has undeniably positioned itself well in every country.

Diversity at work

Workplace diversity brings with it a number of challenges. Many immigrants face language problems that affect the workplace environment. A non-English speaking employee is usually looked down upon as a mediocre worker or reluctant to learn the language. Organizational oneness is missing in such situations.

Psychologists consider communication as a key to building long-term relations. Communication styles build positive emotional relationships among the employees. They



TenStep Supplemental Paper

feel more relaxed more so with informal chats that improve employee morale and performance.

Jose Brisk, president of Staffworks Staffing Services says, "Today's labor market is so tight, ethnic communities have become untapped labor pools that small businesses need to consider."

Fortune 500 companies have ascertained that non-English speaking staff too can have a positive impact on organizations.

This optimism can be attributed to:

- The difficulty in finding skilled labor, managers and technical workers
- Opening of new markets
- The increasing zeal to stick to the jobs
- Lowered absenteeism, higher performance

Initiating the process

Designing a sound multilingual workforce is a not a simple task. The process is continuous and time-consuming. The groundwork for where non-English speaking employees can be fitted should be cautiously determined. In addition the skills of these employees must be evaluated so as to define their value and contribution to the organization. These factors determine the training needs of the multilingual diversity of the employees.

Training

Progressive companies leave no stone unturned in promoting healthy communication among their workforce. The strategy can include studying English as a second language, mentoring, use of audiovisuals and videotapes and providing training materials in the resident language.

These help bridge the gap between the English speaking and non-English speaking groups.

H.J. Heinz promotes English learning through community classes, or in-house training sessions wherein employees from a particular community are taught English.

Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions in Baltimore, like scores of other hospitals, hires nurses from other countries.

Though professionally competent, the nurses face the problem of communicating in English. For example, a nurse from the Philippines who was hired by Hopkins faced tremendous difficulty in following instructions. It was then that more veteran Filipino nurses functioned as mentors to the new recruits. "A mentor helps them understand the rules of the road."

Hopkins uses various personality tests and training programs such that the employees can comprehend better. Regular Myers-Briggs personality indicator tests help in grouping



TenStep Supplemental Paper

people of the same personality types together. This ensures a feeling of togetherness. Similarly, Hopkins applies “The Peacock in the Land of Penguins” training series to promote communication.

Peacock in the land of penguins

This animated video points to employee engagement, morale, and communication within a diverse workforce.

Perry, a peacock, and his friends land on the land of Penguins. In spite of their talent and skill they do not fit in the foreign land. The penguins realize their worth only when Perry and his friends survive encounter a pack of wolves.

The moral is simple and true: “in the ever changing world, all birds would have to appreciate each other’s skill and contributions.”

The video aims at:

- Understanding the likeness and diversity between individuals and groups
- Empowering people to understand and appreciate the diversity amongst the individuals

Laws and guidelines

Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, “about 800 Hispanic workers lost their lives in job-related injuries in 2003; nearly 270 of those deaths occurred in the construction industry.”

Inadequacy in communicating through the English language can pose a severe threat to the employees. This is especially true in the construction industry.

The wellbeing of the employees becomes a critical issue. With organizations getting global it is imperative to formulate solutions (like operating manuals, laws) in different languages. This makes employees aware and secure.

Redress forums

Managements should set up forums to address the problems arousing because of language barriers. The rules and laws should be clear to all the employees.

- The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission deals with complaints of immigrants. Speaking in English is sometimes a company stipulation, but forbidding the use of other languages during time-offs is illegal
- Under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, all U.S. all workers irrespective of their citizenship are protected from discrimination.
- Some organizations make fluency in English mandatory for highly-skilled and top managerial positions. “As one moves up the corporate ladder and reaches a certain level, there’s a definite expectation that you will speak English.”

Circumstances notwithstanding, meeting the challenges of the diverse world is becoming as crucial as ever.