



How Diversity Training Infuriates Men and Fails Women

by Lee Gardenswartz, Ph.D. and Anita Rowe, Ph.D.

The recent article, "How Diversity Training Infuriates Men and Fails Women," promises more than it delivers. Like many similar articles, it makes some fundamental mistakes that lead to faulty conclusions.

The article mischaracterizes what diversity is, how it is defined and what the goals of diversity training are. Most effective diversity initiatives see diversity as much more than race and gender identity and go beyond demographics in addressing it. All kinds of differences, from aspects such as age, gender and race, to work content, education, seniority, position and even personality are elements that contribute to inclusion and exclusion. With this broad scope, hiring and promoting women and people of color is not the only goal of a diversity and inclusion initiative. Generally, that goal focuses on leveraging differences and removing barriers as well as building an inclusive culture in order to achieve the organization's objectives.

Effective diversity training does not bash any group or focus on making people feel guilty for inequities. What's more, it is only one part of a larger change initiative and cannot be expected to increase representation of underrepresented groups or transform culture without accompanying systemic changes. These would include removing barriers to full inclusion of policies and practices connected to systems such as accountability, reward, decision-making and promotion.

We would agree that poorly conceived and implemented diversity training does more harm than good. Perhaps the most relevant questions to investigate might be what kinds of diversity and unconscious bias training and interventions help build a culture of inclusion and engagement that contribute to the organization's success, rather than the binary question of does it work or not.

Sincerely,
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