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Diversity, equality and inclusion...Am I qualified to talk about that?

By Kenra Haftel

Triad EAP, Account Manager

I have given presentations on self-care and written articles on topics ranging from relationship challenges to suicide prevention - all of which are in my wheelhouse. But when asked to create a presentation on diversity, equality, and inclusion I took a step back. What makes me qualified to present on these topics? I am not an expert in this field. I am a white, Gen X, [cisgender](#) woman. However, after a little self-reflection, I thought... why *shouldn't* I create a training on this topic? I know what it feels like to be excluded. Let me tell you about my



brother, Shannon. He is funny. He is stubborn. He loves tractors. And, he is disabled. Shannon was born with Cerebral Palsy. He uses a wheelchair, is non-verbal, and is unable to live independently. Growing up with Shannon was like living with an eternal three-year-old. I remember the constant stares we would get while in public. Friends from school would see us at the mall and feel so uncomfortable around Shannon that they would make an excuse to leave or just avoid us. I was teased for being "overly sensitive" when my peers would make fun of someone with disabilities. The way

people treated Shannon, and in-turn my younger brother and I, took a toll on my family. However, it also inspired my parents. They realized that Shannon's disabilities could help teach those who were more able. In the late 1980's Shannon was one of the first disabled students in a local high school. My high school did not have the resources required so my parents searched until they found one that did. My parents realized that if Shannon was not integrated into society that he would never have the opportunity to become the best version of himself. He was never going to run on the track team or be the valedictorian but he had a lot to offer. My younger brother and I were involved in sports and my parents made sure Shannon attended every event. Even though he was not with us at school his presence known in our circle of friends. With

time and exposure, our friends and his classmates started asking how to communicate with him. They went from being afraid of not knowing how to act around him to simply being themselves. After he started public school we continued to receive unwelcome stares in public but we also were greeted with high-fives and hugs.

As I create the content for my presentation I am reminded that we all have opportunities to grow and continue the journey toward inclusion. We spend more time with co-workers than our families. While at work we are exposed to people of different races, religions, gender, age and abili-

Continued on page 3



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WHAT IS AN EAP?

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LGBTQ+

By Keira Lusby
 Triad EAP, Account Manager

In 2011, The U.S. Military repealed the uncomfortable compromise “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell.” In 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down all state bans on same-sex marriage. And in a historic ruling in 2020, the US Supreme court found that the 1964 Civil Rights Acts protects LGBTQ+ individuals ensuring that sexual orientation and gender identity were no longer legal grounds for discrimination in the workplace.

It is safe to say that the tireless work of equality activists stretching back into the 50s and 60s has paid dividends these last 10 years. But, for those who identify a part themselves in the vast umbrella that is the LGBTQ+ community or for those who consider themselves faithful allies, the work is not over. The experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals often involves increased rejection, harassment, and fear for personal safety. A long-time legal defense known as the gay/trans panic defense, defined by the LGBT Bar as “a legal strategy which asks a jury to find that a victim’s sexual orientation or gender identity is to blame for a defendant’s violent reaction, including murder” is still in practice in many states today, despite efforts to ban the practice at the federal level. Ideologies perpetuated by the gay/trans panic defense work to “other” the LGBT community, perpetuating stereotypes and furthering prejudice.

However, one place where stereotypes and prejudice can be challenged effectively is in the workplace. As diversity practitioner Susan E. Woods puts it in her paper entitled *Thinking About LGBT Diversity in the Workplace* “the workplace, driven by the pragmatic need for improved productivity, talent recruitment, and retention of a motivated workforce, has become a powerful

environment for social change and learning . . . we have learned that prejudice and bias are weakened as people work together and learn through positive experience of respectful interaction.”

The conversation around identity, especial regarding sexual orientation and gender identity, can be confusing. Some people may be overwhelmed by the number of terms and others may

view the conversation as inappropriate for the workplace. However, we must recognize the importance of identity in our day-to-day lives, especially when it comes to communication in the

workplace. The most important thing to recognize when combatting these mind-sets is that identity is in an inherent, fundamental part of each and every one of us. We *all* have a sexual orientation and gender identity but decades of otherizing the LGBTQ+ community solidified the idea that being heterosexual and cisgender (meaning your gender identity lines up with the sex you were born as) is the default and therefore not a fundamental part of identity. Susan E. Woods also makes an important point in this statement, “in the workplace, LGBTQ+ diversity is about recognizing the dimensions of identity; it is not about sexual activity.” Managers and human resource directors have a responsibility to create a work environment that is guided by expectations that advance relationship building and learning in order to foster inclusivity. Woods offers a guideline to ask what needs to be in place at your workplace in order to promote *safety* from harassment, *acceptance* to encourage relationship-building and understanding, and *equality* to ensure non-discrimination and respect for the integrity of relationships and families.



Diversity...continued from page 1

ties. There are more than 162 million employees in the United States. Janet Stovall is a diversity and inclusion consultant and public speaker. During her 2018 TED Talk she said, "...since we spend one-third of our lives at work, what if we did that with people who didn't look like us? I think the world would be a totally different place outside of work." When companies take the steps needed to create a diverse workforce *and* create a culture of inclusion they reap the benefits of a more productive and positive workplace. And, the lessons employees learn at work will likely filter into their communities and their homes. Shannon's journey in public school touched the lives of every classmate, staff member, teacher and beyond.

- ⇒ His teachers were true leaders who helped his classmates learn to understand and accept him.
- ⇒ His classmates took this knowledge home and shared it with their families. Shannon received a standing ovation when he graduated, not just from his fellow students but their families too.
- ⇒ Several of his classmates became special education teachers.
- ⇒ And later, a friend of mine said she was better prepared to parent a special needs child when her son was born with autism.

Had my parents listened to the "experts" who said it would be best to keep Shannon in a special needs school he would have never had the chance to affect the lives of those around him. Can you think of a co-worker who comes from a different background than your own? What could you learn from them? And then, could you share those discoveries with your family and friends?

There is substantial research showing that diverse teams are more innovative and profitable. Creating a diverse work environment is not just a metric to strive for but should be an integral part of your business development plan. While we still have work to do, businesses have made progress in recruiting more diverse employees. The next step is to ensure everyone on your team is included and given opportunities to grow. I have felt excluded by my peers. I have been in situations where I was part of an underrepresented group. However, I am realistic. As a white, generation X, cisgender woman with a disabled brother, I realize that it doesn't happen to me nearly as often as it does others. The purpose of this training will be to help you understand why there is a need for diversity, stress the importance of equitable treatment of all by examining implicit bias and provide ideas on how to improve inclusion in your workplace and beyond.

**Triad EAP is offering a new training opportunity!****Diversity, Equality and Inclusion in the Workplace**

This 60-minute course will help employees understand the importance of a diverse and accepting work environment. Every employee brings unique assets to an organization through their race, color, ethnicity, language, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, gender, socio-economic status, age, and physical and mental ability. By learning to recognize implicit bias, employees will increase awareness and create strategies for being more accepting of their differences leading to a more productive, positive and respectful workplace.

- Define diversity and understand the role it plays in day-to-day interactions.
- Learn to recognize implicit biases and create strategies for increasing awareness when working with underrepresented groups.
- Identify the difference between equality and inclusion in the workplace.
- Review ideas on how to improve inclusion within your organization.

Contact [Amy Weitzel](#) at 970.314.5749 for pricing and scheduling information.