

Tolerance in the Workplace

If the daily news is any barometer, we seem to be living in toxic times. Being an election year, there's a highly polarized political climate that envelops us all like a dark cloud. We could all take a refresher in the fine art of tolerance.

Tolerance is an important life skill, especially in the workplace where we are often thrown in with a diverse group not of our choosing. The best definition of tolerance we've heard is, "The capacity to accept differences in others." These differences might be age, sex, religion, nationality, or sexual orientation. Differences may revolve around beliefs, which would encompass political beliefs. They may also revolve around culture and lifestyle, like food, habits, dress, language, or customs.

Tolerance is giving the benefit of respect to others. It's essentially the golden rule of "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." It doesn't mean accepting ideas we disagree with. John F. Kennedy said, "Tolerance implies no lack of commitment to one's own beliefs. Rather it condemns the oppression or persecution of others."

Tolerance also does not require us to accept racism, sexism, ageism and other forms of "isms." Bigotry is essentially the opposite of respect. In the workplace, every employee has the right to a harassment-free work environment.

Federal and state laws offer workplace protections against harassment and discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, pregnancy, national origin, age, and disability. Harassment includes unwelcome conduct intended to annoy, torment, frighten or otherwise create a hostile work environment.



Diversity in work teams has been shown to be highly beneficial, increasing innovation and creativity. Diversity brings different perspectives, new ideas and different experiences to problem-solving.

Like any other life skill, tolerance can be learned. The Dalai Lama says, "In the practice of tolerance, one's enemy is the best teacher."

Here are some ways to practice tolerance:

- Practice respect and kindness to others
- Words matter - Be sensitive to the language you choose
- Avoid stereotypes and respect individuality
- Be careful about potentially hurtful jokes
- Be inclusive - celebrate diversity
- Focus on commonalities rather than differences
- Stand up for others if they are being treated unfairly or unkindly

Learn more about the benefits of workplace diversity by signing in to your Member website. You can also learn more about preventing discrimination and harassment under Personal Development in your Training Center.