

In facilitating workshops on Valuing Diversity, it's all too common for certain participants to announce, "It doesn't matter whether people are white, brown, green or purple... I treat them all the same." They then smugly look around the room as if to say, "Look at how enlightened I am!"

Frankly for me, this seems far too simplistic and we are missing the whole point. For some people, their "green or purpleness" may be absolutely relevant. To look past cultural context, history and personal story is to look past the core of that individual. It can in effect render them invisible. Where's the richness?

Valuing diversity, for me, means identifying what is truly unique in individuals and respecting those differences as their true gifts. In the workplace, these "gifts" may indeed have little to do directly with race, sexual orientation or gender, per se. They may, however, have everything to do with differences in perspective, thinking style, approach, understanding segments of the customer base, being innovative, challenging status quo... the list goes on.

This diversity of perspective is profoundly shaped by our personal experience and cultural upbringing – experiences that are often impacted by what may appear to be little more than superficial, demographic differences of race, gender, etc...

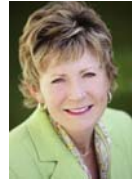
And so, in our efforts to be politically correct and dance around the "superficial" differences, we may miss the opportunity to be genuinely curious and to learn what is truly unique about each of us.

For those of you who are managers, how might your concern for consistency get in the way of your staff being able to



## the diversity dance

BY SUE EDWARDS



contribute to their full potential?

In his book, *The One Thing You Need to Know About Great Managing, Great Leading and Sustained Individual Success*, author Marcus Buckingham notes that, "the chief responsibility of a manager is to turn a person's unique talent into performance." He holds that great managers treat each person *differently* based on understanding each individual's personality, unique talents and motivations.

For me, this management tenet is also one of the most important principles for creating an organizational culture that truly values and draws upon the diversity of its employees.

Studies have shown that, when leveraged, the differences that people from diverse backgrounds bring will enhance the quality of decision-making, increase levels of innovation and create .....

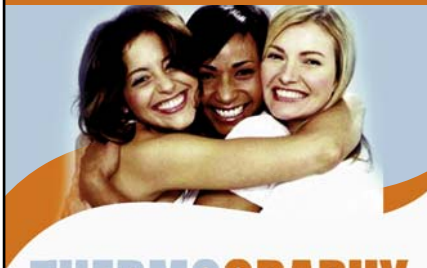
greater connections with the customer. All of this leads, of course, to improved business success and sustainability.

So, tip-toeing around differences does your organization a disservice. It under-utilizes talent. It fosters blandness and mediocrity. In real life... I have found that making genuine, sustainable progress towards a culture that values diversity does not happen through broad-based awareness programs. Instead, lasting impact is fostered through a willingness for individuals to be curious about one another, to have challenging one-on-one conversations and to share authentic emotions.

Vive la difference! ●

*Sue Edwards, PCC, CHRP coaches leaders hired into new organizations or promoted to significantly more challenging levels of leadership. Her program Set-Up to Soar supports emerging minority leaders. For more see [www.clearingthe90dayburdle.com](http://www.clearingthe90dayburdle.com)*

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