

## D is for Differences

Diversity initiatives in organizations often focus on helping employees understand differences in culture and background, ethnicity, race, and lifestyle, and then work to overcome the use of stereotypes and improve awareness, self-awareness, respect, and tolerance among people who are different.

This brief article addresses differences among employees from another perspective altogether!

**People are unique.** You've probably already discovered that some people are really good at detail-oriented work, and some are big-picture thinkers; that not all are "people" people who excel at sales or customer relations. Some are great at coming up with good ideas, others at implementing an idea once they know what it is. We've got to get each of those people into the right seats on the bus, doing those things they are best suited for—or the company won't achieve all that it can accomplish in the world.

**Many facets determine our success in a particular job or role.** Although I do a lot of work with behavioral styles in my coaching, consulting and training, there's so much more to consider when we explore the differences among people who work for us. And the distinctions we consider are also distinctions that exist within each of us—greatly influencing how we manage or supervise those who report to us.

**Receptionist vs. leave-accounting:** A colleague recently described a company that recruited for a single position that included two parts. The "receptionist" aspect answered the phone and welcomed visitors to the company, and the "leave-accounting" portion logged vacation and sick days and reported accruals and remaining days to management and to individual employees. One woman was hired to fulfill both roles. She was productive and efficient, and yet after several months became increasingly unhappy.

A short review meeting uncovered a dilemma. While she loved the details and the ability to focus on accuracy with the leave-accounting, the receptionist duties took so much energy she was too drained to do the other work to her own satisfaction.

Because she was so highly motivated and productive, the company found a way for her to do more task-oriented work, and found another people-oriented person to fulfill the receptionist duties.

**Floor sales vs. inventory updates:** One of my clients talked about how effective his new sales person was on the floor. In the same breath, he'd lament how the young man seldom updated the inventory database when he sold anything. As a result, sales were good, and yet orders for new stock didn't keep up with those sales, and fewer items were available to sell.

It was clear to me that his new salesperson was people-oriented and not detail-oriented, so I suggested that my client choose a different employee for his salesperson to pass inventory updates on to—someone who enjoyed details and accuracy. Problem solved!

**Inside sales vs. outside sales:** Another client hired an obvious extrovert for an outside sales position. The employee worked out well for several years. As time went on, though, a reasonable business decision required this extrovert to do far more inside sales, and almost no outside sales at all. Since he no longer got his energy and renewal from his inside sales job, this employee left the company for a new position that was exclusively outside sales.

Both the company and the employee lost in this one, because the change in staff and the change in positions was costly for both. With improved communication on the employee's part and the employer's part, this might have turned out as a win-win situation. Each needed to be able to express his expectations long before the situation generated resentment.

**What about you, and the people you work with or supervise?** In thinking about yourself, or another individual in your company in a specific situation, are you or they given to:

- \$ being people-oriented or task-oriented?
- \$ making quick decisions, or deliberating by weighing all the pros and cons?
- \$ getting their energy by being involved with people, or going off on their own to regroup and re-energize?
- \$ accepting challenges as opportunities or as roadblocks?
- \$ thinking in the abstract, or in the concrete world?
- \$ speaking concisely and realistically or more perceptively and idealistically?

**Each of us has a unique way of looking at the world,** and a unique way of thinking about the situations we find or place ourselves in. That unique perspective colors how we feel about our work and our relationships. In order to become as productive as possible ourselves, and to help our employees be as productive as possible, we need to be aware of our own perspective. After that, we need to be open to exploring the different viewpoints we encounter among our staff—with curiosity and interest, not judgement and blame. The difference is profound.