Valuing diversity

" Understanding and managing people who are similar to us are challenges — but understanding and managing those who are dissimilar from us and from each other can be even tougher. " The increasing diversity of workplaces around the world means that managers need to recognize that not all employees want the same thing, will act in the same manner, and thus can't be managed the same way. What is a diverse workforce? It's one that's more heterogeneous in term of gender, race, ethnicity, age, and other characteristics that reflect differences. The ability to value diversity and help a diverse workforce achieve its maximum potential is a skill that managers increasingly will find is needed. LEARNING ABOUT VALUING DIVERSITY The diversity issues an individual manager might face are many. They might include issues such as communicating with employees whose familiarity with the language might be limited; creating career development programs that fit the skills, needs, and values of a particular group; helping a diverse team cope with a conflict over goals or work assignments; or learning which rewards are valued by different groups. You can improve your handling of diversity issues by following these 8 behaviors: 1. Fully accept diversity. Successfully valuing diversity starts with each individual accepting the principle of multiculturalism. Accept the value of diversity for its own sake — not simply because you have to. Accepting and valuing diversity is important because it's the right thing to do. And it's important that you reflect your acceptance in all you say and do. 2. Recruit broadly. When you have job openings, work to get a diverse applicant pool. Although referrals from current employees can be a good source of applicants, that tends to produce candidates similar to the present workforce. 3. Select fairly. Make sure that

the selection process doesn't discriminate. One suggestion is to use job-specific tests rather than general knowledge tests. Such tests measure specific skills, not subjective characteristics. 4. Provide orientation and training for minorities. Making the transition from outsider to insider can be particularly difficult for a diverse employee. Provide support either through a group or through a mentoring arrangement. 5. Sensitize non-minorities. Not only do you personally need to accept and value diversity, as a manager you need to encourage all your employees to do so. Many organizations do this through diversity training programs. For example, Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC), has a " Valuing Differences" program in which employees go through training programs designed to help them understand workplace diversity by examining the cultural norms of different employee groups. In addition, employees can also be part of ongoing discussion groups whose members meet monthly to discuss stereotypes and ways of improving diversity relationship. And, as mentioned above, the most important thing a manager can do is show by his or her actions that diversity is valued. 6. Strive to be flexible. Part of valuing diversity is recognizing that different groups have different needs and values. Be flexible in accommodating employee requests. 7. Seek to motivate individually. Motivating employees is an important skill for any manager; motivating a diverse workforce has its own special challenges. Managers must be more in tune with the background, cultures, and values of employees. What motivates a single mother with two young children and who is working full time to support her family is likely to be different from the needs of a young, single, part-time employee or an older employee who is working to supplement his or her

retirement income. 8. Reinforce employee differences. Encourage individuals to embrace and value diversity views. Create traditions and ceremonies that promote diversity. Celebrate diversity by accentuating its positive aspects. However, also be prepared to deal with the challenges of diversity such as mistrust, miscommunication, lack of cohesiveness, attitudinal differences, and stress.