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Hiring a Different Person and if Things Go Wrong, They Can't Correct, Discipline, or Fire Them, For Fear of the Employee Going to the Human Rights Commission

There are many workplace challenges facing Canadians. From observations while working in the field of workplace and community human rights over many years, Stephen Hammond has chosen what he considers the top 10. This video transcript is intended to start a dialogue. If you feel it may help your workplace or your association, please use it. Print out the text, have a discussion, and try to come to resolutions that can be helpful to your group. The best way to deal with workplace challenges is to talk about them in a respectful way. If you would like to access the video that goes with the transcript, it can be purchased at HumanRightsTrainingStore.com

So many Canadians are “different” that it shouldn’t matter. Unfortunately, discrimination still exists for persons who are different from the grandparents of many Canadians. Find ways to ensure your workplace isn’t adding to that discrimination and instead is addressing it.

Statistics from the 2006 census show us that over a 25 year period, the median income (half lower and half higher) of recent immigrants has decreased, even when people are more educated. For example, a recent male immigrant with a university degree earns 48% of what his Canadian-born counterpart earns. So due to language difficulties, lack of Canadian experience, or portability of credentials, there may be some reasons to explain some of that difference.

What we can’t have working against recent immigrants; or persons with darker skin; or people wearing obvious religious symbols; or women in male dominated workplaces, is our added perceptions and barriers, that they will somehow use this difference when things go wrong at work. It’s like a double-whammy. Many people who are “different” than us – whomever us is – already have barriers and then we stack the barrier higher by thinking they will turn around and accuse us of discrimination in the future.

Here’s what we have to do:

- * Hire people on their abilities to do a good job — Make clear your expectations for their job
- * Coach them for improved performance and correct them when they make mistakes

- * Reward people for good performance (even a simple recognition may be sufficient)
- * If in this process someone believes they are being treated unfairly due to their difference, then address it. Specifically:

Listen

Find out if there is any truth to what is being said. Even if only a fraction is true (i.e. some form of discrimination or different treatment), the person will be affected by it

If there is some discrimination – big or small – then address it. Don't downplay it. Find out what needs to be done to correct it and do it.

If there is no discrimination, then address that. Perhaps you will have to address a misunderstanding or perception, but be direct, and don't be defensive.

Either way, let the person know you appreciated her coming forward to discuss this issue and encourage her to talk to you again if she feels there is an issue in the future. We often hold onto things and it creates more resentment over time.

Don't hold something against a person because something else might happen in the future. And just because something like this has happened before, don't assume a similar person will do the same thing. If you follow basic recruitment and employee relations procedures, most of the time you'll get the right candidate and that person will stay when he thinks it's the right fit and he is treated with respect.

Another thing the census told us – “different” Canadians are not so different anymore. The sooner we realize that our country is truly multicultural and will continue to be, the sooner we'll let go of the stereotypes that get in the way of hiring, retaining, and promoting the best people for any job.

What do you think?

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