



## **Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events (T.I.M.E.)**

**Topic:** A Diverse Look at Diversity

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### **Welcome**

This issue of T.I.M.E. is written on the topic of diversity. Here in the United States, I write this issue against a dappled backdrop. It is Black History Month during February, next month is Women's History Month and we are living in a heightened atmosphere of security where people and their actions are suspect based on religion and their ethnicity.

Contributing to this issue of T.I.M.E. is Paul Weldin. Paul sets up the challenge of diversity and offers some tips for us. The reality of the United States is that our workforce is multi-cultural and will continue to be more diverse.

This issue may help you think through the value of diversity and ways make your organization and meetings more diversity-friendly.

Sue  
[Sue Tinnish](#)

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### **Diversity is Everwhere**

When you think of diversity", what do you think of?

- Diversity is present in our workforce
- Diversity is an asset in teams

- Diversity enlivens and enriches our meetings
- Diversity enhances our organizations -- making them more vibrant now and better prepared for the future

Diversity is about *empowering* people. And that simple reason is why we should all care about diversity -- whether we are considering the people or members in our organizations, our teams, our suppliers and vendors or **our meetings**.

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## Diversity in Mind

*Written by Paul Weldin*

Growing respect for diversity in the last ten years has forced businesses to move beyond the "golden rule" of, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you," to a platinum rule that says, "do unto others as they would have you do unto them." It is no longer a cookie cutter world.

Specialization and niche marketing have become cornerstones of our business world. By respecting diversity, we acknowledge the culture of the majority while understanding, and being part of empowering options for minorities and other cultures. When addressing the issue of diversity in our industry, we must first understand it, and then be able to provide service with diversity in mind. This is true for preparing proposals, managing a meeting or running an association.

While attending tour operator conventions in the 70s and 80s, I spent far too much time on the simple task of finding food. It wasn't that food wasn't plentiful at banquets, but as a vegetarian, regardless of any advance preparations I might have made, I usually ended up with nothing, or cold steamed broccoli served about the time everyone else was finishing their chocolate mousse. I learned to keep food in my room, and responded when people asked why I didn't have a plate that I had already eaten.

I also realized that I spent a lot of time securing for a need that had been met for others, and that trying to fulfill that need interfered with my enjoyment and sometimes even success at said function. It is a simple truth: **We perform better, respond faster and achieve higher levels of satisfaction and growth when certain needs are met.**

Abraham Maslow, a pioneer in the field of psychology, published his theory of human motivation in 1943 positing that the human personality strove for "actualization," a concept succinctly captured by the old Marine slogan, "Be all that you can be." To get to that point though, to achieve a level of "self actualization," one had to have certain other needs or motivations satisfied before reaching the highest level. These other needs were all part of what Maslow called the "hierarchy of needs," a five level dynamic grid, or pyramid, with self-actualization as the highest need to be met. From the bottom up, Maslow identified physiological needs (nourishment, air, shelter, etc), safety needs (security, protection from physical, mental and emotional harm), social needs (the need for affection, camaraderie, acceptance, friendship), and the needs of esteem or ego (self-respect, status, achievement, attention).

Once these needs are met in different ways and at different times, one then has the opportunity to “go beyond” one’s current place by doing, by stretching limits, by gaining insight, thereby becoming more than before.

When looked at through the prism of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, diversity takes on a paradoxical reality: We are all different; we are all the same. As different cultures and niche markets are examined, we slowly realize that while every segment of our world population shares similar basic needs, the response to those needs for each group may differ considerably.

As each cultural sub group or niche becomes more demanding of recognition, the success of our response in the service industry is tied directly to the fulfillment of those needs. Once, 3,000 conventioners received the same menu. Now that menu has a host of alternatives, from kosher to vegetarian to lactose free to heart healthy. But this isn’t just about food; this is about a mindset approaching all components of our industry. Its about not questioning a same sex couple checking into a king sized bed, or questioning an elderly couple who booked into a double double because one of them snores too loudly.

While it cannot be said that all meetings, conferences, seminars, etc. are designed with self actualization in mind, it is true that something gleaned at any of these events may be on the path for an individual’s self actualization. Our goal is therefore to help create an environment that responds to as many of the needs of our clients as possible. It requires our ability to provide options, based on the known needs of the clients. Obviously, at some point the response to every diverse cultural need becomes burdensome and the attention to specialization reaches critical mass.

The trick is therefore to know exactly what are absolute necessities for the client, and from there, offer options and access to resources based on your own expertise, and your client’s budget.

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## Five Essentials for Respecting Diversity

*Written by Paul Weldin*

### **1. Know your Limitations**

Understand going into any proposal or service provision, not just what you CAN do, but what you can NOT do. In other words, know your limitations and those of your suppliers.

### **2. The Paradox of Diversity**

Ignoring or dismissing the unique needs of individuals or diverse groups not only alienates them, but interferes with their enjoyment/growth/education. Remember that by offering sub groups different solutions to the same need, you actually bring them all closer together. Go into any venture with the goals of safety, respect, and service for all.

### **3. Ask, Listen, Act**

Approach each potential client with a commitment to understanding the diversity within their group, and assure them that once needs are known (by you), needs will be met based on local resources and budget. Prepare a Diversity Assessment and either go through it with your potential client, or ask them to complete it with the assistance

of their Human Resources (HR) department. Remember that certain cities, regions, counties and states may have their own regulations in addition to federal ones controlling what can be asked or required. Also, make sure everyone knows that the information gathered will be used to provide a bid or service, rather than be used in some manner to discriminate.

#### **4. Beware of the Weakest Link**

No matter how enlightened your own staff may be, it only takes one faux pas somewhere down the service line to turn your commitment to diversity upside down. Training and insistence on strict measures for personnel are imperative when addressing diverse cultural needs.

#### **5. Utilize Free Resources**

When finalizing services, remember that while you may not have been able to respond to all the perceived needs of your clients, there are free resources available that cater to diversity, from telephone information banks to publications to not-for-profit organizations. You may draw on these resources yourself or make them known to your clients.

Paul J. Weldin, CTP, is President of Weldin Resource Associates and L&GIT, Inc. (Lesbians and Gays in Travel). WRA and L&GIT, Inc. both provide needs assessments, product and business development, and marketing for tourism entities, with specialization in niche markets and diversity issues. WRA/L&GIT also offer creative educational seminars, workshops, and personnel training programs for entities in and out of the travel industry.

You can reach Paul at 312-787-6477 or [Paul Weldin](#)

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### **Diversity's Advantages**

When you create a diverse meeting, a diverse association, a company with a diversity-friendly environment or a diverse team, what do you really get?

Here are some of the advantages of diversity:

- **Attraction and retention of the best**

If you are an association, a diverse association will attract but more importantly retain a diverse group of members.

If you work for a corporation, diversity allows you to attract and retain the most talented people.

- **Increased Value**

Associations: Your members will perceive more value if the association is welcoming of diverse membership. Furthermore, your members will grow and learn from each other.

The Business World: A diversity friendly environment allows everyone to become more productive.

Furthermore, a diverse group of employees will generate more creative solutions and more innovation.

- **Stronger and more effective teams**

Diverse teams can deal with change more effectively. Diverse teams can solve problems more effectively and efficiently.

- **Global Leadership**

Diversity allows companies to have stronger employee, client and supplier relationships. Diversity can allow a company to have greater access to emerging markets. Furthermore, a diverse organization can increase client satisfaction.

Even in the association world, most are seeking preeminence globally. Its difficult to be a global leader if your organization is made up of cookie cutter members.

EDS (formerly Electronic Data Systems), the Plano, Texas based global information technology (IT) services company, has this statement in their EDS Diversity Council Charter:

*"To excel as a global leader, EDS's workforce must mirror the diversity of its clients, suppliers and communities in which it does business."*

EDS is located in 60 countries and generates about 45% of its business from non-US revenue. As a company they recognize in order to best serve their 35,000 customers, they must promote diversity in their workforce.

"Corporate success now depends on building positive, productive relationships with people from many cultures around the planet. Corporate cultures that are open, flexible, appreciative and savvy about cultural and lifestyle differences have a complete edge. Having diverse employees in all functions at all levels enhance that edge...", writes Norma Carr-Ruffino in her book, [Diversity Success Strategies](#)

- **Model for the Future**

Political leader Mikhail Gorbachev writes, "We need to find a paradigm that will integrate all the achievements of the human mind and human action, irrespective of which ideology or political movement can be credited with them...I am not calling for a universal leveling, sameness, or uniformity...By no means do I want all nations and countries to be alike...I think the great civilization to which we all belong is one of great multiplicity. And that is its source of strength." Gorbachev is a contributor to [Working Together: Producing Synergy by Honoring Diversity](#).

He writes from a political perspective, but our future is rooted in honoring the thoughts of all people.

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## Path of Diversity

Embracing diversity is not easy. We each carry deeply rooted biases and prejudices. We take in "our" environment and use it as a filter. Our experiences and the influence of our family and other role models shape our perceptions about how we view things and how we respond to them.

Many of our bias are good as they allow us to assume that something is true without proof. Otherwise, we would have to start learning from scratch everything that we do. But, if we allow our bias to shape our perceptions of what people are capable of, then the bias is harmful. Or biases are undesirable, when we prejudge others.

And the challenge is that we are attracted to people who are like us. Its easier to talk with someone with whom you have a great deal in common. Rapport comes from finding common ground.

When you talking with some one very "different" from you, it is more difficult to establish that rapport and feel comfortable.

I read several years ago about Coors' efforts to increase the diversity of its workforce. Consider one of the most high pressure meetings: the job interview. The company had to shift its Human Resources professionals from hiring people they felt comfortable with during an interview to hiring people they felt less comfortable with! Otherwise the organization would only perpetuate its culture and continue to be in-bred.

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## Reading and Resources

Paul Weldin wrote about free resources and here is a website that I like:

[Diversity Resources](#)

In addition, [Paul Weldin](#) is a great resource, albeit not free! He offers customized Diversity Assessments in addition to educational seminars, workshops, and personnel training programs. His contact information is:

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Email: [wearelegit@aol.com](mailto:wearelegit@aol.com) or click here [Paul Weldin](#)

Additionally, here are recommendations for books:

[Diversity Success Strategies](#)

This book offers a blueprint for business success in a rapidly changing and increasingly

diverse work environment. The book provides a success strategy for employers and employees alike to develop more productive and satisfying work alliances.

[Working Together: Producing Synergy by](#) Honoring Diversity

In this book, Angeles Arrien compiled 18 articles from different people in art, academics, business and world leadership. Each chapter presents a diverse point of view on the subject of diversity. The end result is a book which can expand our thinking about diversity for our own personal growth, interpersonal development and global consciousness.

[Acceptance: Developing Support for](#) Change (Diversity Breakthrough! Strategic Action Series)

This is a toolkit for those wishing to bring diversity to their small group or to an overall organization. Acceptance focuses on developing internal support for diversity-promoting change within the organization, from engaging leaders at all levels to connecting with sponsors to getting buy-in from everyone involved.

This short book (64 pages) includes self-assessment tools, concrete action strategies to mobilize change, and fun, quick action-planning worksheets. The information in this book can be adapted to a small group or the overall organization. Debbie Kennedy, the author, provides first-person accounts from leaders in such diverse organizations as the U.S. Army, Leap Wireless International, IBM, and the Mars Exploration Program. In the book, they talk about how they have grappled, and continue to grapple, with diversity issues in such areas as business practices, staffing, and overall culture.

This book is part of an overall series which Debbie Kennedy calls the "imperfect circle" of change: "Assessment," "Acceptance," "Action," "Accountability," "Achievement," and "More Action."

[The Diversity Toolkit : How You Can](#) Build and Benefit from a Diverse Workforce

The "diversity toolkit" features easy-to-use tips for improving communications skills, practical guidance for perfecting team relationships, and helpful suggestions for attaining leadership skills. It is useful for people at all levels.

[Voices of Diversity: Real People Talk](#) About Problems and Solutions in a Workplace Where Everyone Is Not Alike

The two authors present comments from African-Americans, Latinos, disabled workers, gays, and others that help businesspeople better understand each group.

Finally, do you need to be aware of religious holidays? Are you conscious of the needs of a diverse audience? The 2003 InterFaith Calendar offered by the MPI Chicag Area Chatper's Diversity Committee can help you in your planning efforts. Buy a 2003 calendar for your office and use it as a convenient and definitive source. Contains information and holiday information for many religions including Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, Orthodox Christianity, Catholic Christianity and Jainism.

The calendars are \$15.00 (a \$18.00 retail value) and will be sent to your office. If you would like to purchase one, please contact Sue Tinnish at stinnish@ameritech.net or 847.394.9857.

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## Quotes & Freebies

**“No member of a crew is praised for the rugged individuality of his rowing.”**

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

## FREEBIE

Here are personal hints for enhancing your own personal diversity open-mindedness:

1. Expect to feel some discomfort.

Change is not easy and you are upsetting deeply rooted biases and learning.

2. Actively seeking information from people from a variety of backgrounds and cultures. You will learn and grow from the experience.
3. Within your world, create an environment in which every member feels a part of.

And if you want to further your own understanding of yourself and diversity, I would recommend this book: [The 10 Lenses: Your Guide to Living & Working in a Multicultural World](#)

This book provides a model to understanding different perspectives, even ones that are dramatically different from one's own. Author Mark Williams offers 10 models or lenses for how one can view the world.

Five of his lenses include:

- Assimilationists who believe that everyone should just become a regular American
- Culturalcentrists who believe that a person's race or ethnicity is central to their personal and public identity
- Meritocratists who believe that if you have the abilities and work hard enough, you can make your dreams come true regardless of race or culture
- Victims/Caretakers who believe that because of prejudice, you will never succeed
- Colorblinds who believe that we are all the same under our skin

## More FREEBIES

If you are interested in receiving the results to our Survey, "What is a Transformed

Meeting?", please email me. Just send a blank e-mail to Stinnish@ameritech.net or click here [Survey Summarized](#)

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### Your Thoughts Summarized

Thank you to everyone who completed last month's survey on Innovative Meetings. If you are interested in the summary of the survey, please email me. Just send a blank e-mail to Stinnish@ameritech.net [Survey Summarized](#)

Or if you have tips or ideas you think would be valuable and you would like to be published, send them our way! I like to think of us as a great source of information but I, like our other readers, are always on the look-out for ideas, best practices or suggestions. E-mail us any time: [My Idea](#)