

by Tommy Charles Updated May 19, 2018



Experts contend that by 2050, minority groups in the U.S. will become a majority of the population. Hispanic populations have already exceeded 40-million individuals, and Arizona is projected to become a minority-majority state by the year 2027. As a business owner—or a business-hopeful in the hospitality sector, you are particularly sensitive to changes in immigration patterns. You and your staff come into contact with people from all walks of life and are expected to navigate cultural differences with ease. With a bit of work and forethought, you can. Read on.

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The Importance of Workplace Diversity in Hospitality and Tourism

Tourism, and the broader hospitality industry, provides an opportunity for employees and tourists alike to engage in new cultural experiences and to gain insights into how other people live. For employees to interact with people of broad cultural backgrounds, including varying races, creeds, ages, colors and sexual orientations, it is important for them to appreciate cultural differences. To this end, and as someone interested in the hospitality industry, it is crucial that you train your personnel to embrace people from diverse backgrounds.

More to the point, workplace diversity reinforces and encourages understanding of different cultures and cultural backgrounds and enhances hospitality by giving staff invaluable contact with varied cultural backgrounds. Indeed, it is ideal to employ people from all walks of life and from many nationalities in the hospitality industry especially. Doubtless, workplace diversity also helps you cultivate a positive reputation among your clientele, and this is a concrete benefit.

Workplace diversity in the hospitality industry is achieved through codified guidelines that promote equal employment opportunity regardless of age, sexual orientation, race or creed.

Benefits of Diversity in the Hospitality Industry

people isn't a great strategy for finding the best and brightest. Look at it another way. In nature, a species has the best chance of survival when it has diverse genetic interplay going on. At the end of the day, your business is much the same.

Additionally, a diverse workforce allows for positive organizational culture. Illustrating that hard work, initiative and out-of-the-box thinking will be rewarded regardless of race, creed or sexual orientation promotes good morale, and good morale always pays dividends. What's more, the higher level of psychological engagement from motivated staff feeds on itself and builds momentum over time.

A welcoming workplace encourages employee loyalty, which can help you retain talent and cut turnover down. You're no doubt aware that turnover can be a business killer. Indeed, if you aren't careful, turnover can become one of your main expenditures, and it is especially damaging over time. By promoting diversity, you can build a stronger corporate culture that will encourage team members to stay when they might otherwise leave. Imagine for a moment that an employee gets an offer from another company for a higher salary. If the other company has a dubious corporate culture relative to yours, you may stand a chance of retaining the employee.

Being in the hospitality industry, it may be obvious that you would do well to retain staff who speak multiple languages and who are fluent in the customs of various cultures. However, this is an important point, and it shouldn't be understated. By encouraging a diverse workforce, you may well position yourself as a standout operation. A smaller language barrier means one less thing for your clients to worry about as they travel.

Naturally, cultural diversity won't happen on its own, and the benefits above don't come about without some effort. You should plan from the outset to consciously encourage diversity. And keep in mind that while some of these benefits occur in parallel, some must be achieved before others can be attained. For instance, changes to your overall company culture takes time, and the benefits of a diverse company culture won't show up overnight.

Encouraging Diversity in the Workplace

As an operator in the hospitality industry, you have a leg up when trying to make your operation more diverse. Since your industry requires flexibility due to long operating hours and seasonality, you have every reason to embrace cultural differences that may demand flexible schedules. Don't fight it—embrace it, and use it as a reason to diversify your workforce.

Below are a few other tips you can use to cultivate diversity.

- Question yourself. When hiring, firing or promoting, ask yourself if you would be making the same decision if the person's cultural background were the opposite of what it is.
- Acknowledge differences. People are different from one another, and there's nothing wrong with that. Don't shy away from these differences, and keep in mind that part of acknowledging diversity is acknowledging different personalities and managing styles.
- Seek out mentors for your staff. If you have underrepresented staff, connect them with a mentor of similar background, ideally within your own organization. Doing so can increase their confidence.

choice that promotes diversity. You've covered your bases and criticism that you made the choice for the sake of diversity will be invalid.

- Consider Implicit Bias Training. This training helps staff recognize and acknowledge when their decision making is influenced by cultural—and often unconscious—biases. Offering implicit bias training to your entire staff can result in measurable benefits.
- Encourage your executive team to perform self-evaluations. Ask your leaders to check their social networks. Are most of their connections their own race, age, sex or creed? This exercise can help staff recognize areas in which they can be more inclusive.
- Recognize the value of multiple perspectives. A diverse staff gives you access to a wide array of perspectives. Use this to your advantage.

Bolstering your workplace diversity can yield measurable benefits, but you have to work for it. The hospitality industry tends toward inherent diversity, but don't let this lull you into complacency. There's always room for improvement—and remember: this is a long term investment. You won't see returns right away. But if you stick with it, your business will be stronger and more robust.



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