

## Diversity Doesn't Work

Peter Bregman ■ March 12, 2012

"Lana was the head of Human Resources for Bedia, a company in the media industry that felt, at times, like an old boy's network. Diversity wasn't just a professional issue for her; she cared about it personally. Over the years, there had been a number of incidents at Bedia in which individuals had felt misunderstood, mistreated, or disrespected. Eventually, someone sued. In the most recent situation, someone used a word in a letter that felt derogatory to a number of African Americans. Before that, someone sent a sexist joke around the office and a female coworker was offended. There were other incidents too.

Bedia had tried to address the issue in a diversity training that carefully outlined what people were allowed to say, and what they weren't.

They also tried diversity training that brought groups of people into a room and asked them to separate into categories.

Still, the problem persisted. The organization was tense and the CEO worried that, eventually, Bedia would end up in another lawsuit.

He was right.

That's when Lana called me. Would I do diversity

training?

There are two reasons to do diversity training. One is to prevent lawsuits. The other is to create an inclusive environment in which each member of the community is valued, respected, and can fully contribute their talents. That includes reducing bias and increasing the diversity of the employee and management population.

Lana made it clear to me that Bedia was interested in the second reason, not just the first, and I agreed to investigate.

But after speaking with a number of people in the organization, it confirmed a feeling that had been pestering me for years: Diversity training doesn't extinguish prejudice. It promotes it.

At first glance, the first training — the one that outlined what people could and couldn't say — didn't seem to hurt. But on further inspection, it turns out it did.

The scenarios quickly became the butt of participant jokes. And, while the information was sound, it gave people a false sense of confidence since it couldn't possibly cover every single situation.

The second training — the one that categorized people — was worse. Just

like the first training, it was ridiculed, ironically in ways that clearly violated the recommendations from the first training. And rather than changing attitudes of prejudice and bias, it solidified them.

This organization's experience is not an exception. It's the norm.

A study of 829 companies over 31 years showed that diversity training had "no positive effects in the average workplace." Millions of dollars a year were spent on the training resulting in, well, nothing. Attitudes — and the diversity of the organizations — remained the same.

It gets worse. The researchers — Frank Dobbin of Harvard, Alexandra Kalev of Berkeley, and Erin Kelly of the University of Minnesota — concluded that "In firms where training is mandatory or emphasizes the threat of lawsuits, training actually has negative effects on management diversity." But it's deeper than that. When people divide into categories to illustrate the idea of diversity, it reinforces the idea of the categories...

Categories are dehumanizing. They simplify the complexity of a human being. So focusing people on the categories increases

their prejudice.

The solution? Instead of seeing people as categories, we need to see people as people. Stop training people to be more accepting of diversity. It's too conceptual, and it doesn't work.

Instead, train them to do their work with a diverse set of individuals. Not categories of people. People. Teach them how to have difficult conversations with a range of individuals. Teach them how to manage the variety of employees who report to them. Teach them how to develop the skills of their various employees.

And, while teaching them that, help them resist the urge to think about someone as a gay person, a white man, a black woman, or an Indian. Also help them to resist the urge to think about someone as "just like me" — that's a mistake too.

Move beyond similarity and diversity to individuality. Help them see John, not as a gay white man, but as John. Yes, John may be gay and white and a man. But he's so much more than that.

View the entire article at: <https://hbr.org/2012/03/diversity-training-doesnt-work>



## Class-Action Employment-Discrimination Lawsuits Are Rare

*Published: April 6, 2011*

Class-action lawsuits alleging workplace discrimination, like the large sexual-harassment lawsuit filed against retail giant Walmart, may get a lot of press attention. But these cases are also extremely rare, according to a new study released by the American Bar Foundation.

The study, featured in the "Journal of Empirical Legal Studies" notes that most people who file employment-discrimination lawsuits do so as solo plaintiffs and are likely to receive modest settlements or nothing at all.

Study authors Laura Beth Nielsen, Robert L. Nelson and Ryon Lancaster examined employment-discrimination cases filed in federal courts between

1987 and 2003 and found that cases involving multiple plaintiffs, class actions and representation by the EEOC or a public-interest law firm are extraordinarily rare.

"Many commentators claim that class-action lawsuits are quite common," says Neilson, a research professor at the American Bar Foundation and associate professor of sociology and director of the Legal Studies Program at Northwestern University. "In reality, they make up less than 1 percent of the federal caseload."

According to their findings:

- More than 40 percent of plaintiffs either have their cases dismissed or lose at summary judgment

- About 50 percent settle very early in the process
- Only 6 percent of those filing employment-discrimination lawsuits in federal court go to trial
- Of the 6 percent of filings that go to trial, plaintiffs win 33 percent of the time, or in 2 percent of filings overall.

In addition, the median award for all cases was \$30,000, of which a portion goes for legal fees, the study says. About forty percent of plaintiffs win nothing.

View the complete article at: <http://www.diversityinc.com/legal-issues/class-action-employment-discrimination-lawsuits-are-rare/>

## Is Diversity Necessary for a Successful Workplace? Top tech companies hire mostly male Caucasians

*By Monica Rozenfeld • August 8, 2014*

Over the last few months, several high-tech powerhouses have released the demographics of their workforce. Google, the first Silicon Valley company to do so, revealed in May that its staff is 70 percent male, 61 percent Caucasian (and 30 percent Asian). LinkedIn and Yahoo followed suit by showing that each has a more diverse workforce than Google, but not by much.

One obstacle to diversity

claimed by Google is that women earn only about 18 percent of all computer science degrees in the United States, while blacks and Hispanics earn fewer than 5 percent. But some argue that it's not only about education but also the hiring process. A *Wall Street Journal* blog cites laziness as the main reason why companies fail to recruit talented workers from different backgrounds, hiring those they already know or are familiar with.

**Do you believe it's important for companies to have a diverse workforce? Why aren't tech companies hiring talent from underrepresented groups**

View this article at: <http://theinstitute.ieee.org/opinions/question/is-diversity-necessary-for-a-successful-workplace>