

Everyone's Worthy

Treating Others With Dignity and Respect

Objectives:

- A** Describe ways in which people differ.
- B** Demonstrate procedures for treating others with dignity and respect.



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Personal differences are all around us. You can probably look at the person sitting next to you right now and immediately find at least three differences between the two of you. You may be a boy; she may be a girl. You may be reserved; she may be outgoing. You may be African-American; she may be Asian. Just because the two of you are different doesn't mean you can't be friends or work well together on a class project. The world would be pretty boring if everyone were the same!



There are also personal differences between coworkers at virtually every business. For a business to succeed, coworkers must learn to appreciate each other's differences and treat each other with respect and dignity. Keep reading to learn more about the ways people are different and how you can treat them with dignity and respect no matter what.

- ▶ *You can use basic manners to show respect and treat others with dignity.*

A Different World

Show a little respect

Think about the last time that someone was rude to you, called you an insulting name, or was dismissive of your ideas. How did you feel? Probably not good! That's because the other person was not treating you with dignity or respect. When you're **respectful** of another person, you honor their rights, freedoms, views, and property. This means not starting an argument or being rude to someone just because they have a different opinion. Instead, you listen to the other person's opinion. Showing respect means listening to others when they speak, not interrupting, and using basic manners (such as being polite, saying please and thank you, and maintaining proper eye contact). This is all part of treating others with **dignity**, or as if they are worthy of your respect and honor.



Respect is a two-way street. If you treat others with dignity and respect, others are more likely to treat you the same way. The problem is that we don't always know how to treat others respectfully. Sometimes, we are disrespectful to others without knowing it. One of the reasons that people can treat each other disrespectfully is that they don't understand each other's differences. This can create a lot of problems, especially in the classroom or the workplace. That's why it's important to understand the basic ways people are different and to value, or appreciate, those differences.

Ways people are different

Think for a moment about the ways you are different from others around you. Some of these differences are permanent, while others might change. We need to explore both kinds of differences.

Gender identity. **Gender identity** refers to how people define their own gender. Some people may identify as male or female, while other people express a more fluid gender identity.

Respect



- ▲ *Respect works both ways! If you treat others with respect, others are more likely to treat you the same way.*

Race. Some people identify as a specific **race** or a combination of races. In 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau listed 15 racial categories on the questionnaire it sent to every housing unit in the country. They were:

- White
- Black (African-American)
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian Indian
- Chinese
- Filipino
- Japanese
- Korean
- Vietnamese
- Native Hawaiian
- Guamanian or Chamorro
- Samoan
- Other Asian
- Other Pacific Islander
- Some other race



◀ *Race is just one of the many ways people can be different. There are 15 different racial categories on the U.S. Census questionnaire.*

Individuals whose parents are both of the same race may identify themselves with that race. Individuals whose ancestors are from more than one race may consider themselves to be **biracial** or **multiracial**. On the U.S. Census questionnaire, individuals may choose to identify with any number of the races listed or decline to identify with any.

Mental ability. This term refers to an individual's learning and thinking abilities. People are born with different mental abilities. Some people might learn challenging math concepts very quickly and easily, yet have to work much harder to learn a foreign language. Other people may find it easy to learn a foreign language but difficult to acquire math skills.

Sexual orientation. This term refers to an individual's sexual and romantic preferences. For example, you may identify as gay, your best friend may identify as straight, and people you encounter at work may align with another identity.

Physical abilities and health. We all have different physical abilities and health concerns. Some people may have disabilities, while others may deal with chronic health conditions that require frequent hospital visits or certain accommodations. Some of these disabilities or health conditions may be visible, while others are less obvious.

- ▶ *Some disabilities require accommodations or equipment, such as wheelchairs.*



George Doyle/Stockbyte/Thinkstock

- ▶ *People are divided into age brackets such as toddlers, middle-aged adults, and senior citizens. What are the age brackets in your family like?*



Cathy Yeulet/Hemera/Thinkstock

Age. **Age** is determined by the number of years a person has lived. One of the ways we divide people into categories is by age group. We refer to such age brackets as infants, toddlers, school-aged children, teenagers, young adults, middle-aged adults, and senior citizens. However, this does not mean that all people in a specific age group are alike.

Religion. **Religion** is an organized form of belief in a higher power. Some people have no religious beliefs. Others have religious beliefs but do not belong to any specific religious group. Still others are part of religious groups such as the Protestant, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist faiths.

Ethnicity. **Ethnicity** is the background people inherit from the ethnic group, or **culture**, with which they identify. Each culture has its own customs, habits, and traditions that have been developed over time. Some examples of cultural traditions include Polish folk dances, the German celebration of Oktoberfest, and the Chinese New Year parade.

Geographic origin. **Geographic origin** refers to the part of the world and the type of area from which a person has come. This is different from ethnic heritage because it involves the effects of the environment on people. The place where a person is born, brought up, and/or lives has a strong influence on him/her. In recent years, access to technology has narrowed the geographic differences among individuals.

Education. **Formal education** is the amount of learning a person has acquired in the classroom. **Informal education** is knowledge acquired through life experiences. This means that the workplace may be made up of people with a wide range of educational experiences.



▲ *Your formal education could include your high school or college degrees.*



Language or language usage. People differ in the languages they speak and/or the ways in which they use language. While English is the language used by most North Americans, some speak the language of the country from which they or their parents came. In addition, the way English is used in one part of the country or the world may be different from the way it is used elsewhere. For example, a “pop” in the Midwest may be called a “soda” on the East Coast or a “Coke” in the South.

This quiz from the New York Times, “How Y’all, Youse and You Guys Talk,” highlights the way the English language is used differently in different parts of the country: http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/12/20/sunday-review/dialect-quiz-map.html?_r=1&. Take the quiz and find out what your answers say about where you’re from.

Personality. Personality is the combination of all of an individual’s personal characteristics, or traits. Each person is unique because each combination of personal traits is different. One individual might be described as shy, hard-working, and selfish, while another person might be characterized as outgoing, intelligent, and stubborn. These different combinations of traits create personalities that range from pleasant to difficult.



You can learn more about positive and negative personality traits in the article “Examples of Personality Traits” from Your Dictionary: <http://examples.yourdictionary.com/examples-of-personality-traits.html>.

Lifestyle. **Lifestyle** is the way in which people lead their daily lives. There are many varieties of lifestyles, often defined by such factors as a person's attitudes, interests, and the activities s/he pursues. For example, a city-dweller who enjoys going to concerts and dining out has a different lifestyle than a nature-lover who enjoys spending time in the woods hiking and looking at wildlife.

Job position. **Job position** is the worker's assigned duties and the level of authority that goes with her/his job. Job positions range from beginning, or entry-level, workers through supervisory and managerial jobs to executive-level management. The viewpoints of individuals at different levels of responsibility are often quite different.

Valuing differences

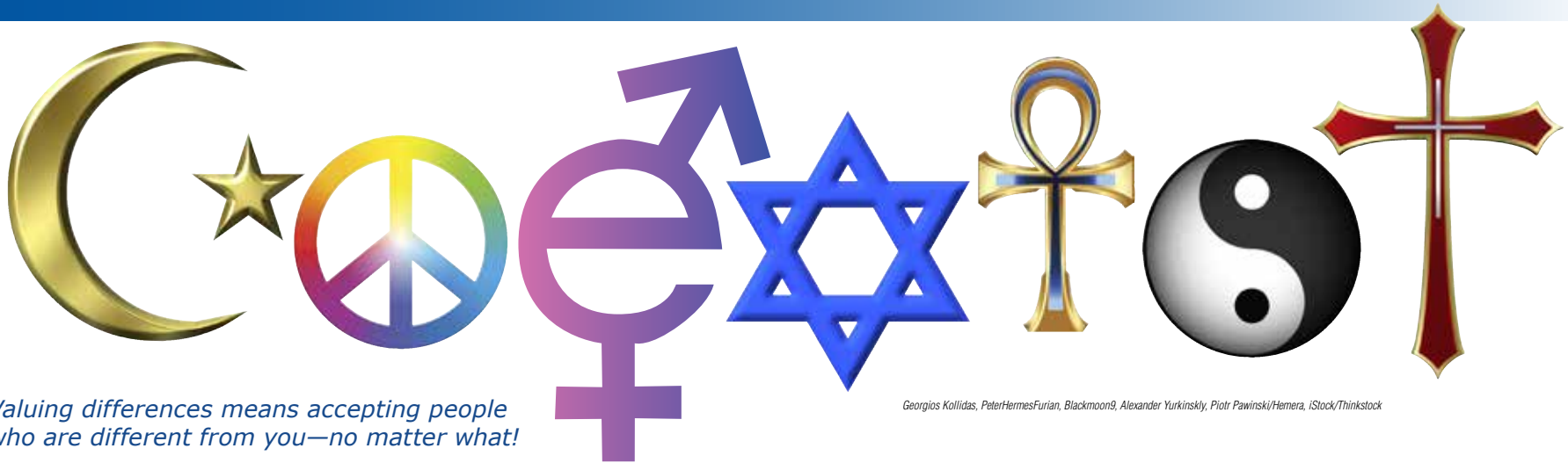
As you can see, it's easy to list many ways in which people are different. You could probably add others to the list. If people are to respect each other, they need to value, or appreciate, these differences.

What is your favorite fast-food meal? Is it pizza, salad, and a soft drink, or is it a hamburger, french fries, and a milkshake? Whatever your favorite combination may be, each of the foods in it is different, but each one is good. You don't expect the french fries to taste like the pizza or the salad to taste like the milkshake. In fact, you'd be very upset if they did! In other words, you value the differences in foods.

The same principle applies to valuing differences at school and in the workplace. Let's look at what it means to value differences.

THE GRAY ZONE

One way to treat others respectfully at work is to avoid using offensive language. However, different people have different ideas about what offensive language means. Let's say one employee continually uses a word that another employee finds offensive. The two coworkers disagree about the meaning of the word, and the person who uses the word says that it's his right to free speech to continue using it. Using language that could be considered offensive in the workplace isn't illegal—but is it ethical? What do you think?



▲ *Valuing differences means accepting people who are different from you—no matter what!*

Georgios Kollidas, PeterHermesFurian, Blackmoon9, Alexander Yurkinsky, Piotr Pawinski/Hemera, iStock/Thinkstock

Accepting people who are different. Accepting people just as they are is an important step in valuing differences. When you accept someone, you create a starting point for a good relationship with that person.

Taking a positive attitude toward differences. Taking a positive attitude toward differences means that you will do more than just accept the differences. It means that you will look for the good in the differences rather than the bad. Perhaps you work with someone who is older than you. If you have a positive attitude toward differences, you might consider this an opportunity to benefit from the older person's experience and advice.

Learning from others who are different. Learning from and about people who are different from ourselves broadens our view of life. We learn what makes them different and why they hold certain opinions. This helps to create understanding. If you have a classmate whose ethnicity is different from yours, you have an opportunity to learn about new traditions and customs. If you share your own traditions with your classmate, both of you will understand each other better. Respect can help you both learn new things.

Recognizing that people's similarities are more important than their differences. Coworkers often depend on each other to be successful at work. They should focus on the things they have in common rather than on the ways in which they are different. Perhaps there are people with various gender identities who sell the same products for a company. These salespeople should be much more interested in the fact that they are all in the business of selling than in the fact that some of them identify as one gender rather than another. If you and a classmate are working together on a project, remember that you have a common goal no matter how different you are from each other.

Importance of valuing differences

We've talked about the ways people are different and how to value those differences. Now you need to know why this is important.

Environment. Valuing and respecting differences helps to create a better, more pleasant environment for everyone. People who treat each other with dignity and respect feel better about themselves and about each other. They get along better and feel they are part of a team.

Productivity. Workers who are treated with dignity are more likely to be satisfied workers, and satisfied workers are more productive. Studies have shown that workers who feel good about the workplace get more work done because they are more motivated than dissatisfied workers. They also don't waste time complaining. This means that both the workers and the business benefit since greater productivity usually means more income and profits. At school, students who are treated with respect will have an easier time concentrating on work than students who are treated disrespectfully or bullied.



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- ▲ *We're all different! Valuing those differences can make everyone feel like part of the same team.*



◀ *If businesses don't treat employees respectfully, they can find themselves in court.*

Legal requirements. Businesses are required by federal, state, and local laws to treat employees respectfully, regardless of their differences. Workers who do not comply with the law cause problems for the business. In some cases, employees who treat coworkers disrespectfully can cause lawsuits to be filed against the business.



Differences in employees can help businesses target markets, communicate with customers, and more. This article, "The Value of Diversity in the Workplace" by Eric Feigenbaum, explains why cultural differences can be so beneficial for businesses: <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/value-diversity-workplace-3035.html>.

Summary

Most people want to be treated with respect and dignity. Often, disrespectful treatment occurs because people don't understand each other's differences. Some of the ways people are different include gender identity, race, mental ability, sexual orientation, physical abilities and health, age, religion, ethnicity, geographic origin, education, language/language usage, personality, lifestyle, and job position. Valuing differences means accepting people who are different, taking a positive attitude toward differences, learning from others who are different, and recognizing that people's similarities are more important than their differences. Valuing differences is important to create a pleasant environment, to encourage productivity, and to comply with legal requirements.

TOTAL RECALL

1. Briefly describe each of the following ways that people are different:
 - a. Gender identity
 - b. Race
 - c. Mental ability
 - d. Sexual orientation
 - e. Physical abilities and health
 - f. Age
 - g. Religion
 - h. Ethnicity
 - i. Geographic origin
 - j. Education
 - k. Language or language usage
 - l. Personality
 - m. Lifestyle
 - n. Job position
2. What does it mean to value differences?
3. Why is it important to value differences?



Steps to Respect

There are no hard-and-fast rules for treating other people with respect. Every environment is different, and every group of people is different, as well. Sometimes, your job or school will have policies for you to follow in your dealings with others. These policies might be in a handbook, addressed during orientation, or discussed with you directly. No matter how these policies are communicated to you, it's your responsibility to follow them. Not every place has a formal policy outlining how you should treat others. However, you are still expected to treat each other with dignity and respect. Let's examine some general steps you can follow to treat others respectfully in any situation.

Step One—Get acquainted.

The first step of respecting people is getting to know them. Getting acquainted doesn't mean that you need to establish personal friendships with everyone you meet. It *does* mean that you should speak to people when you encounter them, learn to pronounce their names correctly, and sometimes ask them how they are.

- ▶ *Getting to know your coworkers and classmates is an important part of respecting them.*



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Step Two—Treat people as individuals.

Treating people respectfully does not mean treating everyone the same. What is respectful to one person might be disrespectful to another. Each person is an individual. Don't form opinions of people based on such characteristics as their race, gender identity, or religion. That is called **stereotyping**, which means believing that all the people in a particular group are alike (which isn't true). If you use stereotypes, you are being **prejudiced**, or **biased**. This keeps you from treating others with respect.

Step Three—Listen and learn.

Listen carefully to the people around you. It is especially important to listen carefully when you disagree with a coworker or classmate so that you can resolve the disagreement. Being willing to listen can benefit both of you. For example, if a coworker has found a new way to do a job task, listen while s/he explains it. Don't close the person out because you have your own way of doing the work. You may find the new method is better than yours. In addition, your coworker will appreciate your effort to show respect.



- ◀ *You've probably disagreed with a coworker or classmate before. It's still important to listen carefully. You could learn something new!*

Step Four—Do your fair share.

Always carry your part of the workload. Understand what your job duties are, and take full responsibility for handling them. You are not respecting your classmates if you slack off on a group project and let them handle all the work. This also means not taking credit for work you didn't complete. Cheating on a test isn't respectful of your classmates, and accepting your boss's praise for work you didn't do isn't respectful of your coworkers.



- ▶ *Do you take full responsibility for your work? Doing your fair share is an important part of treating others respectfully.*





◀ *Even if a coworker has political or religious beliefs that differ from yours, it's important to respect her/his beliefs instead of arguing.*

Step Five—Avoid controversial topics.

Controversial topics are subjects about which people have strong feelings. Examples include politics and religion. When controversial topics come up, people often have strong opinions. Those strong opinions can lead them to be disrespectful of other people. If you find out that a coworker has political views or religious beliefs that are different from yours, it is important to respect their opinions by avoiding arguments and insults. Although coworkers usually discuss business while on the job, they may mention controversial subjects over lunch, at breaks, or during business-sponsored social functions. In such situations, it is best to try to end the discussion as soon as possible. You might change the subject, ignore the coworker's comment, or simply agree to disagree with the person who initiated the topic.



This article by Jacquelyn Smith, "Should You Discuss Politics and the Election at Work?," highlights the pitfalls of talking politics on the job and gives some tips on how to avoid uncomfortable topics:
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/jacquelynsmith/2012/04/27/should-you-discuss-politics-and-the-election-at-work/#4cd942ff1feb>.

Step Six—Recognize and avoid harassment.

Harassment is any kind of behavior toward another person that is carried out for the purpose of annoying or intimidating the individual. This includes teasing, making inappropriate remarks or gestures, criticizing, or engaging in any activity that makes another person feel uncomfortable. Anyone can be a target of harassment. People are harassed because of their gender identity, race, age, religion, ethnicity, weight, abilities, etc.

One highly publicized form of harassment is **sexual harassment**. This includes any unwelcomed sexual remarks, advances, conduct, or requests made to another person. Sexual harassment can create a hostile work environment and make its victims feel their jobs are threatened.

The federal government has passed laws to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. Both the employee(s) and the business can be sued by workers who feel they have been the victims of sexual harassment. It is, therefore, important for employees to be careful what they say to coworkers because even remarks that are meant to be innocent can be misunderstood. Coworkers should be careful when making comments about anyone's personal appearance or telling jokes that might have sexual overtones.

Although you should always use caution around controversial topics, this doesn't mean you should ignore harassment when it happens to you or others around you. If you are harassed at work or if you see a classmate being bullied, speak up! It's not disrespectful to stand up for yourself or others.



▲ *Bullying classmates isn't just cruel...it's harassment. Respecting others means recognizing and avoiding any behavior that is meant to annoy or intimidate another person.*

Step Seven—Avoid using offensive language.

Offensive language is words or phrases that are distasteful or insulting. Most of us understand what kind of language falls under this description. Some examples would be swear words, vulgar language, and ugly or insensitive terms used to refer to individuals or groups. It is considered disrespectful to use offensive language at work or at school.



Check out the article “Can You Get Fired for Cursing at Work?” by Alina Dizik to learn more about how using profanity in the office can make people uncomfortable and have negative repercussions:

<http://www.cnn.com/2011/LIVING/07/25/cursing.at.work.cb/>.

scanrail/iStock/Thinkstock

Step Eight—Use empathy and tact.

Empathy is the ability to put yourself in another person’s place. Tact is the ability to do or say the right thing in any circumstances. These two tools will help you respect others because empathy helps you to understand them, and tact helps you to avoid offending them. If a coworker has suffered discrimination because s/he is part of a minority group, empathy will help you to understand how that person feels. Or if one of your classmates is being bullied because of her/his sexual orientation, empathy will help you put yourself in her/his place. Tact will help you to say something that lets the person know you understand the situation.



This video from The RSA, “Brene Brown on Empathy,” clearly explains what empathy means:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewvngu369Jw>.

Step Nine—React appropriately to individuals with disabilities.

It's important to treat people with disabilities with dignity. Part of being respectful is recognizing and accepting that these individuals may need certain accommodations at work or at school. People who have physical disabilities may need special equipment to help them perform their jobs effectively or participate in team sports. Or individuals with diabetes may need to take extra breaks to give themselves insulin shots or to eat a snack.

Be considerate of people with disabilities, extending them the same courtesies you would offer other people. Although your first reaction may be to offer special assistance, wait until your help is requested. This is more courteous. It also allows you to give the specific kind of help that is needed in the way it is needed.

- ▶ *Everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. This means extending everyone the same courtesies.*



The article “Tips on Working with Disabled Co-Workers” by Elizabeth Layne provides more information on being courteous and respectful toward people with disabilities: <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/tips-working-disabled-coworkers-36629.html>.



Keep at it

Following these nine steps will give you a great start on your way to treating everyone with dignity and respect. Keep in mind that you won't always be treated with respect, and you'll probably make a few mistakes yourself along the way. If you find yourself accidentally treating others without dignity, try to learn from your mistakes and constantly improve.

Summary

There are no hard-and-fast rules for treating coworkers with dignity and respect, but these simple steps are helpful: get acquainted, treat people as individuals, listen and learn, do your fair share, avoid controversial topics, recognize and avoid harassment, avoid using offensive language, use empathy and tact, and react appropriately to individuals with disabilities.

TOTAL RECALL

1. Briefly describe the following steps for treating others with dignity and respect:
 - a. Get acquainted.
 - b. Treat people as individuals.
 - c. Listen and learn.
 - d. Do your fair share.
 - e. Avoid controversial topics.
 - f. Recognize and avoid harassment.
 - g. Avoid using offensive language.
 - h. Use empathy and tact.
 - i. React appropriately to individuals with disabilities.