The Strength of Diversity

Think of diversity as all the wonderful elements that make up a precious gem. We usually are attracted to a ruby, emerald or sapphire by its color. However, as much as beauty is what appears on the surface, it is also a combination of color, the unique elements that make up the stone and its surface appearance. Same goes with each of us and our teams.

Each of us is unique and different; influenced by our gender, nationality, race, religion, sexuality and age. When we contribute and allow others to contribute as part of a team, magic happens. We accomplish that difficult project or ridiculously tight deadline because one of us says something or does something that sparks an idea and solves a problem. An obstacle is overcome. We’re closer to our goals and we feel valued.

It’s difficult to imagine a time when women weren’t in the workforce. Or, if they were, they were openly discriminated against. We can still see this same type of discrimination against people based on religion, race, age, sexuality, disability; basically anything that noticeably separates or makes us look different from our co-workers can be a reason for exclusion or, worst, ridicule.

These videos show examples of fierce women who made a difference in business and used the “feminine” quality of feelings and passion to drive them to help each other and those less fortunate. Some men are profiled as well because they show how listening and gathering different perspectives made their relationships and businesses stronger.

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It didn't come easily for any of these leaders; they faced the same obstacles many of us face as we reach for our goals. But the similar thread in all these videos is respect, effective listening, the hunger for and value of different perspectives and the knowledge that we're in this together, not alone.

Following are our suggestions on how to use the Strength of Diversity videos. These videos will illuminate and back up the key training points you're making. Donald Van de Mark is the interviewer and host of many of these videos. He was a former anchor at CNN and PBS.

Concept: Self-Esteem and Business (Mary Kay Ash: 5:49)

Get past the bouffant, big shoulder pads and the pink Cadillacs, and you’d think you were walking into your latest new company driven by empowering workers with Flextime, telecommuting, outrageous recognition and the latest self-help strategies for building self-esteem.

But, long before Google and technology that made it easy to work from your home, Mary Kay Ash built a cosmetics business that not only was hugely successful but provided the means for housewives to become independent and make their own money. In the process, a lot of women were empowered; their self-esteem soared.

Self esteem is directly related to satisfaction and happiness. If you want to cultivate someone’s ability, Mary Kay Ash says, “Make them feel important.”

Suggested Questions:
What were some of the obstacles or self-esteem issues that Mary Kay faced?

Possible Responses:
Being divorced
Having little money
Being passed over for promotions by men she trained
Receiving little respect
Death of her husband

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What motivators did Mary Kay use to overcome obstacles?
Possible Responses:
Finding and focusing on what she was good at: sales
Wrote a book so she could teach others how to lead and empower people.
Tapped into the power of self-esteem
Used her self-esteem issues to connect with others
Celebrated her uniqueness and made it fun for everyone

While this video is about a remarkable woman, what lessons can apply to any group?
Possible Responses:
We all want to be valued and make a difference
Each of us has a contribution to make
Our “difference” is a strength that can fuel us
Celebrating is a great team or individual motivator

Watching this video, do you have any ideas about how better to motivate all members of your team?
Possible Responses:
Ask for individual input
Foster and support inclusion among the team
Actively generate feedback and solutions and reward ideas that help the business
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Concept: Generating Self-Esteem (Madame CJ Walker: 5:01)

Married at 14 a mother at 17, widowed at 20, one generation from slavery, black and poor. The odds were definitely against Madame CJ Walker. On top of that, she was going bald and her self-confidence was cratering.

What did this woman do? She decided to find a solution to her problem. When she did, it was the birth of a business.

We often hear about how entrepreneurs often solve a problem that becomes the genesis of a company. But, this was around 1900. Women and certainly not a black woman seldom launched their businesses. On top of that, Madame CJ Walker let her pride of her African roots show up on the marketing of her hair products.

Madame CJ Walker didn’t stop when she became wealthy, she decided to set up a system for other women to earn a living and make a better life for themselves. She then started a school teaching women about beauty, direct sales and financial independence.

Suggested Questions:
What character traits did Madame CJ Walker possess to succeed against the odds?
Possible Responses:
Need to Survive
Resilience
Drive
Self-Awareness and pride in who she was

What struck you as the most important part of her story regarding her leadership skills?
Possible Responses:
Giving back
Ability to see through the obstacles to the opportunities
Use a perceived weakness, being and African American, as a strength

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Watching this video, do you have any ideas about how better to handle obstacles?

Possible Responses:
Focus on opportunities or solutions
See how to use my own uniqueness as a strength
Focusing on helping others fuels my drive to succeed.
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Concept: Passion to Make Change  (Anita Roddick: 1:54)

The Body Shop and I have always been closely identified in the public mind. The Body Shop is not, and nor was ever, a one-woman-show – it is a global operation with thousands of people working towards common goals and sharing common values. That’s what has given it a campaigning and commercial strength and continues to set it apart from mainstream business.”

Anita Roddick

Anita Roddick was one of the richest women in the United Kingdom. She was the founder of her own company. She made it her business to mix profits with helping the environment and the less fortunate.

From the video: Anita Roddick at a Nicaragua garbage dump: “THIS is an example of where the global economy does not work. This is rare to find people from business to come and stand here and not only to absorb and to take back their experience but to damn well do something! I believe you have to have a bottom line that incorporates human rights, incorporates social justice and you have a real protection for that silent group, the environment.”

Interviewer: “Why are you so energized by injustice?”
Anita Roddick: “Number one, the alternative is death. Number two…”
Interviewer: “Death to you, your spirit?”
Anita Roddick: “Yeah, yeah, undoubtedly. Number two, is I have enormous resources and influence so I’m a great believer that, you know, with the influence I have and the distribution network I have, I have the power to change.”

Anita Roddick was a passionate leader who rallied her workers around the concept of helping the less fortunate and the environment through her trade practices. As a result her business has prospered.

But, passion does not have to be about a cause. It really is about what motivates us. It is where we get our energy. Authentic, passionate leaders tap into our energy. They hit a chord. It is what makes us want to take the hill with them, no matter how difficult. We know they care. As the saying goes, they will never care about how much we know, until they know how much we care.

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Suggested Questions:
Can you think of a leader at your own company, in business, politics, or the arts that you’ve admired for rallying his or her team to success? What did they do?

Possible Responses:
Thanked people by sharing credit
Asked for input
Led by example, shouldered huge responsibility, protected the team
Gave the bigger picture so we understood where we fit in

In your daily job, what about it excites you? What gets you energized?

Possible Responses:
Collaborating with a team
Being creative
Solving problems

Can you remember when you were able to rally your team or colleagues? What worked?

Possible Responses:
Asking for their input
Thanking them.
Communicating and collaborating on how to reach the goal
Planning a celebration or party
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Concept: Managing Stress with Effective Communication (Ann Bancroft & Liv Arnesen: 4:06)

Sometimes life feels like an endurance contest. So, there’s no better way than to learn how to survive its challenges than from endurance athletes. Polar explorers Liv Arnesen and Ann Bancroft went through grueling physical and emotional pain as they trekked 1700 miles across Antarctica. They never reached the South Pole but they accomplished more than that by trying their best and staying positive.

They say they had to take personal responsibility to speak up if something was wrong. And, they had to stay positive to avoid a deep spiral of negativity.

Suggested Questions:

How did these two women handle negativity?

Possible Responses:
Focused on the positive
Took personal responsibility for communicating their feelings or ideas
Asking for help

How do you react when stressed?

Possible Responses:
Go to those with whom I’m most comfortable
Exclude others who might distract me or need me and focus on my task
Ask others for input or clarification
Communicate the stress and ask for ideas from various members of my team and other divisions
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Concept: Cultivate Accountability  (Unwritten Rules: 2:25)

Authors Deepak Chopra and Mathew Fox have written extensively about finding our life purpose and tapping into our life meaning. But, with the demands of raising a family, getting a paycheck and rushing through life, we can skip asking ourselves these questions.

In fact, we can go on auto-pilot and not realize we've made assumptions about what's right or wrong; we set up rules and beliefs that act like a trip wire when someone crosses them. We may feel anger or resentment because co-workers with different beliefs and assumptions cross our boundaries. We may decide we're better off not telling the boss about a problem. Or, we decide to withhold information to gain or stay powerful or, because we don't want to rock the boat and keep our job.

Yet, how can anyone know what we think or feel if we don't speak up and contribute? How can we make a connection or make a difference? Is that the kind of life we want to lead?

Suggested Questions:
What make you unique and valuable?
Possible Responses:
I'm from _______ and I want to succeed
I have 25 years experience as a _____________ and have a lot of wisdom
I'm young, passionate and energized to make a difference

Can you remember a time when you didn't take a chance and it held you back?
Possible Responses:
I didn’t speak up about a problem with a project and it took us longer to complete it.
I had questions about a project but didn’t want to seem negative
I didn’t ask for a promotion and was passed over.

What are the unwritten rules you play by?
Possible Responses:
Don’t rock the boat
Stay quiet and then tell my opinion to my closest colleagues
Don’t challenge the boss

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What makes you happy?
**Possible Responses:**
- My children
- Mentoring and teaching
- Making a difference
- Being heard and contributing to a goal
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Concept: Diversity Propels Innovation (Pierre Omidyar: 2:30)

Where do you get your best ideas? Are you exposing yourself to the best sources of information? Are you speaking regularly to your staff or customers? Are you speaking to a diverse group of people?

EBay founder, Pierre Omidyar (Pierre Oh-mid-ee-yar), explains how he had to widen the scope of people he listened to when he was trying to solve a problem of finding Pez dispensers for his wife. He explains how diversity propels creativity and innovation. In fact, this is the tool he used to found eBay.

Suggested Questions:

Why should I take the time to solicit a lot of different perspectives?
Possible Responses:
We might find a hidden opportunity
We might find a flaw we can fix sooner
We’ll have better information to launch with a product or service, helping to guarantee success
We will be educating and pre-selling

What are the demographics of the people buying your product/service? If you are internal to the organization, who is your sales team selling to?
Possible Responses:
Young, urban educated
Don’t know
Baby boomers around the world

Why is it important to know and understand who you’re selling to even if you’re not directly in sales?
Possible Responses:
It might help to come up with new products or services for this group
Could ask people in my organization who are a reflection of our customers for their input
Helps to understand our customers and how I might be able to contribute
Competition and growth of the business depends on workers that care and contribute and know the business.
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Concept: Respecting Your Colleagues (Ben & Jerry: 2:30)

When Jerry Greenfield and Ben Cohen started Ben & Jerry’s Ice Cream, Jerry could have blamed or, worst, excluded Ben from being involved in testing their product before launch. Ben’s “disability” was that he had virtually no sense of smell. Instead of letting that stop them or, worse, creating conflict between them, they laughed and used his deficiency to make a superior product; ice-cream full of chunks and original, strong flavors.

Jerry Greenfield:”It was very challenging. (laughter.) But, I mean it was the secret to the success of the ice cream. I mean I just remember making all these batches of ice-cream and I’d give it to Ben and he’d say, ‘Oh, it’s really good, the texture is good, I love it but I can’t tell what flavor it is. You’ve got to put in more.’ And, at the point that Ben could tell what flavor it is, you knew that you had a very well flavored ice cream.”

Another important lesson from Ben & Jerry is the concept of caring for one another, their workers and the community while having fun. That connection and friendship made them better able to listen to each other and tackle obstacles and create opportunities together. And, in the process they created brand identity, loyalty and a thriving business. In 2000, they sold the company to Unilever for over $300 million.

Suggested Questions:
Think of a time when the team faced huge obstacles and was able to overcome them. What behavior was present among the team?
Possible Responses:
We listened to each other’s ideas because no single person had the answer
We knew we were stronger together than apart.
We valued each person and wanted his/her input

List the prices we pay for judgments that stop creativity.
Possible Responses:
We lose our competitiveness
Team members stop speaking up and caring
We don’t have as much energy or fun.
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Concept: We versus “I” in Teams (Bill Bradley: 2:25)

The strength of a team comes from the contribution and connection between individual members. If members feel disrespected or devalued, conflicts occur or contribution withheld. The team spends more time with office politics or derailing each other than building toward a win. The genesis of this conflict often comes from assumptions based on superficial signals, such as skin color, age, whether someone is married or single. If we’re not careful, we can exclude people simply because they’re different from us, severely diminishing the strength of our team.

In a well functioning team, members continuously explore and respect each other’s values. We share knowledge, communicate and listen to our team members. When the hard push comes to compete, we revel in our collective win. We know we couldn’t’ get there without our team.

Just as the collective skill set of a team is necessary to win, it can also compensate for individual deficiencies or momentary weaknesses. This makes the team stronger and flexible to withstand transition and change. When authority rests with the team, it can agree upon core values and ground rules. The team can also serve as a safeguard preventing rogue behavior or potential ethics violations.

Bill Bradley, former US Senator, presidential candidate and NBR star believes if we can really get our heads and hearts around the important concept of a team win over our individual win…than we will know success.

Suggested Activity: Understand Cultural Differences and Values

Ask each team member to share a favorite proverb such as “the early bird gets the worm” or, “don’t judge a book by its cover”. Depending on the members of the team, the proverbs could come from other countries or cultures. This is a great way to create understanding and value of different people.

The team members explain why they like the proverb they chose and what the underlying value is behind it. This informs the team of what various members’ value and also allows the team to discuss how it is beneficial to the functioning of the team as a whole. Once the values are identified, it allows the team to provide feedback for certain behavior.
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Some possible proverbs and what they mean:

- “Don’t judge a book by its cover” could mean that anyone’s idea is worth hearing, regardless of their position in the organization. 
  *Moral of the proverb*: Listen to all ideas.
- “The appetite comes during a meal” might imply that as a team works on a project, they are energized along the way as they see what is created. 
  *Moral of the proverb*: Taking action versus procrastinating creates energy.
- “You miss 100% of the shots you never take” could possibly mean success doesn’t come without taking risks. 
  *Moral of the proverb*: Take educated risks to win.

Create a new proverb for the team. Example: “A team that listens is innovative and worth being on.”