

Scott Warrick, JD, MLHR, CEQC, SHRM-SCP
Scott Warrick Human Resource Consulting, Coaching & Training Services
&
Scott Warrick Employment Law Services

(614) 738-8317 ♣ scott@scottwarrick.com
WWW.SCOTTWARRICK.COM
Link Up With Scott On [LinkedIn](#)

TOLERANCE v. APPROVAL *(or “Behaviors” v. “Beliefs”)*

As in any program ... you must define your terms. If not, everyone will look at your program in a different way, which is not good. In fact, if we asked 100 people to define what the term “tolerance” means, we could walk away with many different definitions, and many of them would not even be close to what we mean in this program.

So, what is Diversity?

“Diversity” is anything that makes us different from one another.

What is Tolerance?

“Tolerance” means I am not going to persecute you because you are different.

That is it. Simple.

This is the lowest standard I can think of ... **AND WE CANNOT HIT THAT!**

We persecute people because of their skin color, age, race, religion, sex and so on.

Our issue today in **not** Diversity. The real issue in our great lack of Tolerance.

In fact, if we put 50 white Anglo-Saxon Protestant straight males into a room together, it wouldn't look like we had very much diversity.

But think about it:

**How long would it be until they disagreed with one another
and were at each other's throats?**

The issue here is really quite simple:

- First of all ... you don't train people in **“DIVERSITY.”** “Diversity” is a noun. “Diversity” is what you **ARE** ... not what you **DO**. We “have” diversity ... we “do” tolerance.

We don't train people how to be white, or black or whatever.

Diversity is ***not*** the issue. The issue is Tolerance.

- What we need to do to keep our organizations on track, as well as our careers, we need to train people in “**TOLERANCE**.”

“Tolerance” is a verb. You train people in the skills they need to be “tolerant” of anyone who is different from them.

“Tolerance” ***does not*** mean that you are going to “look down on someone” or simply “put up with someone.” That would actually be very intolerant. You would in fact be persecuting that person. That is simply not allowed. THAT must become part of your culture.

Still, I will often get complaints over using the word “tolerance.” I will hear such comments as:

“I don’t want to be just *tolerated*. I want to be ***accepted***.”

My response to this question is always the same:

“Do you really think that we have the right to tell you and your co-workers how to think? You want us to tell you who you should be accepting of and of whom they should approve? You want us to dictate to everyone what they should believe?”

At that point, I usually get a stunned look from the person, so I ask, “Wouldn’t that make ***us*** more than just a little intolerant?”

It is important to understand there is a vast difference between “**APPROVAL**” and “**TOLERANCE**.” An organization cannot ... and **SHOULD NOT** ... require its people to change their **BELIEFS**. If an organization’s Tolerance/Emotional Intelligence Program can get someone to re-evaluate their prejudices and become more accepting of others, then more power to them. Great! Education has the power to do just that. Education can indeed change people’s attitudes and build acceptance.

However, employers simply do not have the right to tell employees what to believe. Requiring “**acceptance**” actually destroys the idea of both “tolerance” and “diversity.”

- If everyone thought and believed the same things, then where is the diversity?
- If we required everyone to believe a certain way, then where is the tolerance for other people’s ideas?

Although it is nice to think that we could all be very accepting and approving others, ***requiring*** employees to change their **beliefs** as a condition of continued employment is ***unacceptable***. Actually, requiring your employees to change their personal beliefs to match yours is an extremely self-centered and intolerant issue all in itself. Unfortunately, far too many people who serve on “Diversity Committees” see their role as being just that:

The Moral Police ... and set all the “morals” for everyone.

I once had a client who implemented a new Diversity/Tolerance Program. As part of this program, the Diversity Committee required everyone to sign a document that said the employees were going to be accepting of other people and their differences.

Signing this acknowledgement was not optional. It was mandatory and a condition of continued employment.

In other words, if you did not sign it, you would be fired.

However, there were a few Muslim men working at this facility who refused to sign the document. It was at this point when I got a call from the company. So, I went into talk to them.

I started by asking them a simple question, “Why don’t you want to sign it?”

One of the men looked at me, held up the document and said, “This paper says that we are to be ‘accepting’ of everyone who is different from us. Our religion says that it is a mortal sin to accept homosexuality. If we sign this paper, we are saying that we are accepting homosexuality. If we do that, we will all burn in hell.”

“Well,” I said, “if you don’t sign it, they are going to fire you.”

Of course, as soon as that came out of my mouth, I remember thinking, “Wow. That is a heck of a choice. Get fired ... or burn in hell.”

So, I asked these men if they would sign a document that said they would be tolerant of anyone who is different from them, which means they would not persecute anyone who is different from them?”

Instantly, they all responded, “Oh, yeah. We’d sign that.”

One man said, “I actually have several friends here that are homosexual. I like them, but I can’t sign something that says I accept their lifestyle.”

So, we changed the document to say that employees were not going to persecute anyone because they are different. Once we did that, all of these problems of telling employees what to believe went away.

The moral of the story:

Employers should require their employees to be **TOLERANT** towards others. In other words, I may not agree with your life choice, but I would never think of persecuting you or treating you worse because you choose to live differently than me.

Employers have *no right whatsoever* to tell their employees how to *think*, what to *believe* or who they must *approve of or accept*. When employers and “diversity experts” require their employees to be *accepting* of others, they have actually just established the textbook definition of a “cult” because everyone must look to the leader in forming their opinions. Such an approach to diversity changes the organization into a “fascist state,” which is intolerance at its worst because I am telling you how to *think* ... regardless of your personal and religious beliefs.

However, employers have *every right* to require employees to change their *BEHAVIORS* in order to conform to the organization’s culture and image. I don’t care what your beliefs are, but if you want to work here, you will:

- Be **TOLERANT** of other people’s beliefs, which means you will not demean or persecute anyone who is different from you or whom you do not approve, which is an **EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE** issue, and
- You will **COMMUNICATE** with one another according to our EPR Skills (Empathic Listening, Parroting and “Rewards.”).

An organization’s message should be very clear on this point:

**If you cannot meet this minimum standard, then you will need to leave.
Intolerant behavior will not be tolerated.**

In other words ...

We will be very intolerant of your intolerance.



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Business First's 20 People To Know In HR

CEO Magazine's 2008 Human Resources "Superstar"

Nationally Certified Emotional Intelligence Instructor

2012, 2008, 2007, 2006 and 2003 SHRM National Diversity Conference Presenter

Scott Warrick combines the areas of law and human resources to assist organizations in **"Solving Employee Problems BEFORE They Happen."** Scott uses his unique background of **LAW** and **HUMAN RESOURCES** to help organizations get where they want to go, which includes coaching and training managers and employees in his own unique, practical and entertaining style.

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are favorites for anyone wanting to learn Employment Law and run an HR Department.

Scott's academic background and awards include:

Capital University College of Law (Class Valedictorian (1st out of 233))

Master of Labor & Human Resources and B.A. in Organizational Communication: The Ohio State University

The Human Resource Association of Central Ohio's Linda Kerns Award for Outstanding Creativity in the Field of HR Management and the Ohio State Human Resource Council's David Prize for Creativity in HR Management

For more information on Scott, just go to www.scottwarrick.com