

So, what is NOT DIVERSE?

How to bring a diverse team together.

I have been developing a theory on the creation of our core personality for many years that is at the centre of my work on compassionate leadership. In it, I espouse that when you strip back the layers of social conditioning and get to the core of the person, we are more similar in our aspirations than we think, with the main differences stemming only from our deep intrinsic motivations. Our core-self is fixed around 8-years old, which is also the time we realise we are being judged, and so change our behaviours in order to be accepted within our local social norms. The adult has moved far away from that 8-year old child-self and is, in essence, a false personality detached from the real. It takes a huge energy for us all to play our role in society, but almost no energy to drop the pretense and be ourselves - that is the power of authenticity.



BY MANLEY HOPKINSON
DIVERSITY

There is a danger with this detachment from our real selves when we are trying to bring teams of people together. Who are we trying to bring together? The real person, or the one who is playing the part that society expects? It is easier to focus on the polarities and differences of the adult than the complementary synergies of the child, so it will be harder to bring together a team of diverse adults than to tap into the core convergence of the child.

"The child is the parent of the adult". In other words, we are formed from the experiences of our youth, and if those experiences have been dramatically different, then so will we be. That diversity of experience is the value in collaboration, but also the tension in teamwork, and the struggle when we are trying to "bring a diverse team together".

So the answer is above. Let us work on bringing the "child-self" together as we will be much closer and more receptive. The adult is driven by subconscious back-stories, filters and projections, prejudices and habits - by ego. The child by curiosity, connection, creativity and growth.

When a diverse team first comes together, the room is tense and tight as the egos rub together; the static friction like rain drops in a cloud sparking lightning. We need to "distract" the ego, the intellect. We need to drop the armour, the walls, the barriers, and invite the child-selves to come together. We need to remove the social layers, like peeling an onion, to get past the cultural and social expectations and to find the core. For this, we use the power of story, metaphor and a shared experience.

I have been running a particular exercise across the whole world for the last 15 years, with diverse, cross-cultural teams from global organisations, spanning six continents and involving Asian industrialists, South American oil workers, European manufactures, North American conglomerates, Arabian dynasties,

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Indian entrepreneurs and African business leaders.

As I tell the story of one of my many expeditions - sailing 32,000 miles around the world in the BT Global Challenge yacht race - with incredible adventures brought to life with dramatic pictures and films, so their subconscious selves become totally absorbed in the drama. With the intellect distracted, we stop the story and reflect on what is important to them if they were in the story too; if they were with me on the yacht deep in the southern ocean.

I ask, "What would you want to gain for yourself?", "How would you work together on the yacht?" and, "What would you want to achieve?"

They stop and reflect in silence. They share. The energy is strong, positive and vibrant. Beautiful synergies. Inspiring differences. Surprising revelations. It is fun. But it is always the same. The same words no matter what part of the world, what layer of society, what ethnicity, sexual orientation or religion. The ego-driven diversity of societal expectation and cultural influences fall away. We come together in the story in such a powerful way that it humbles me, every time.

Then we stop the story and drop the metaphor. They are they. Back at work. A diverse team trying to come together. I ask, "What words

would you now like to strike out?", "What can we now not do?"

Always, the team look at what they have written, reflect on what they have shared and look around the room at the incredible people they have just met, and answer, "Nothing. This is what I want to be. This is me". This is who we are and how we want to be together."

To bring a diverse team together, you will need to spend time to truly get to know yourselves and each other. Not as society expects, but as your child-self knows. It is the child within us that will bridge the gap of diversity and release the beautiful energy of the team. ■

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