Workshop #5: Workplace Patterns
(understanding differences in the workplace)

As we know, people are called individuals because each person is different. Each person has unique tendencies, traits or styles that make them who they are. This is true in school, in your community and, of course, in the workplace. The more you understand about these differences, the better equipped and prepared you'll be to effectively communicate and work with each individual you meet. The purpose of this Workshop is to discuss these differences. Just because people are different from each other and from you, it doesn't mean that they are less capable. It just means they see things from a different experience, culture, or perception. And, when you learn how to understand some of these differences, you'll begin to recognize that these differences make for a richer work team and a broader perspective which most often leads to better results for an organization when all its individuals work together effectively.

Workshop Topics

1. The Differences between Worlds (Education, Disability and Work)
2. Individual Differences
3. Multi-Generational Workforce Differences
4. Diversity Patterns
5. Gender Perspectives
6. Boss, Coworker, Customer Relationships
7. Employment Opportunities

In addition to the discussion notes listed below, more content on each these topics can be found in "Part II: Workplace Patterns" of the *Make It Work: Disability & Competitive Employment* book available at https://wid.org/wid-e3/employment-empowerment/.

Discussion Notes

1.) The Differences between Worlds (Disability, Education and Work)
If you're entering the workforce for the first time, it's important that you understand and appreciate the differences between these three worlds (disability, education and work).

Here might be your experience with each of these three worlds:

✓ World of Disability – Most of your life in this world has been spent learning about and managing your disability skills (self-determination skills, independent living skills, civil rights, educational rights, disability access and accommodation needs, etc.). This world spins around laws like IDEA, Section 504, ADA, State protections and disability related programs.

✓ World of Education – Most of your life has been spent in the educational system as a students working within the rules and expectations of teachers and school systems.

✓ World of Work – A new and different world. People are competing for jobs, careers and promotions. The major concerns are around finding a job that you like, earning money, getting, and keeping a job.

If you're on the verge of a major life transition – from school to work, it's time to shift gears and prepare yourself for the new reality ahead. In order to begin to understand this transition better, let's examine some of the major differences between and among these three worlds.

Areas of major differences between the worlds of <u>disability and work</u> are:

- Relationships: disability relationships are most often candid and open about disability issues and concerns. In the workplace relationships are professional not familiar. Personal problems and feelings are not usually openly discussed.
- Schedules: disability schedules are more in tune with disability needs. It's generally understood and appreciated that a disability means you might have to take more time to do your tasks including getting out of the front door of your home. In the workplace, people generally don't want to hear about your scheduling problems. Work starts at 8:00 a.m. and you are expected to be on-time.

Success measures: disability success might be measured by your ability to demand access and equal treatment under the law. Workplace success is doing the duties of your job and achieving the successes your boss requires. In your worker role, more diplomatic skills are expected than aggressive disability advocacy type skills.

Areas of major differences between the worlds of <u>education and work</u> are:

- Relationships: school relationships between and among teachers, family & friends are mostly friendly and familiar. In the workplace relationships are professional not familiar. Personal problems are not usually discussed.
- Schedules: school schedules tend to be more forgiving around taking time-off when sick. And, when you return, all is forgiven and forgotten with a note from your parent. In the workplace, you earn sick leave after working for weeks or months and can only take that time off when really sick (doctor's note needed to prove it).
- Dress behaviors: school dress codes tend to be more relaxed, including your personal devices. Fitting into fashion trends may be allowed. In the workplace, the office dress code is for everyone. And, good appearance includes your personal devices.
- Success measures: school success is measured by grades. And, often, students can negotiate them by asking for extra credit or appealing a grade they don't like. And, if you grades aren't good, there's always next time. In the workplace, it's more disciplined. If you get an "F", it's for fired.

So there are significant differences worlds of education and disability and the world. Be ready.

2.) Individual Differences

People are not all alike. Each person we meet is likely to have something or things about them which make them different from us. Sometimes these differences are minor and we can easily accept them. Other times, these individual differences are more dramatic, even to the point of confusing or even scaring us. When this happens, we may see the differences as an undesirable fault or weakness. We may think them odd and, as a result, avoid someone. When this happens we may make the mistake of thinking we're better than they are because they don't think, act or look like us. Or, these differences may make you feel inadequate about yourself. You're not as good as they are. For example, let's say you're the silent or the quiet type. It's difficult for you to walk-up to a person you don't know (maybe even one you do know) and start a conversation with them. People may have made fun of you for being like that. And, you worry that they're telling people you're antisocial, shy, retiring, or even a snob or stuck-up because you don't say much. These reactions have an impact on your self-esteem. You may feel inadequate and even hate yourself for this tendency. Well, at the other end of this spectrum of this personality type is the extrovert. That's the person who dominates the conversation. They love to talk. They'll approach anyone and start-up a conversation about anything. And, they often say whatever they happen to be thinking, without carefully considering what they are saying. They may also be criticized for being a loud mouth, never letter others speak, and even for saying stupid things. These two examples give us an insight into idea of individual differences. Neither example is the right way or the wrong way to be. It's just the way some people are wired or built. If you are one or the other, the key is to accept how you're wired and begin to learn that it's normal. So, get liberated and learn how to embrace and use your natural style in a positive manner.

There's an interesting test that helps people better understand how they and others different from them are wired with various personal tendencies or types. It's called the "Myers-Briggs Type Indicator" (MBTI) assessment tool or test. This tool or exercise asks you a number of questions which help you to understand what your individual differences are; and, in turn, gives you a chance to learn about the value of being wired the way you are. The fact is that no matter how you're wired, those tendencies or preferences give you power and value to perform at work and elsewhere (socially). And, when you better understand these tendencies and related values about both yourself and others, you can begin to understand their values especially when working with others and in teams.

3.) Multi-Generational Workforce Differences

Just as individuals exhibit different preferences or tendencies, various generations of workers have their preferences and tendencies. With people living and choosing to work longer, it's likely that when you report for work you will meet bosses and co-workers from these various generations. If you understand that each group or generation of workers has had a different life experience which sometimes sets their work expectations differently from other generations, you can be more successful navigate these differences.

There are five generations of workers currently in the work force. Each one views the workplace slightly differently.

They are:

1. Traditional Workers (born before-1945) – currently 2% of the workforce
2. Baby Boomers (1946-1964) – currently 31% of the workforce
3. Generation X or Gen X (1965-1980) – currently 32% of the workforce
4. Millennials or Gen Y (1981-1994– currently 34% of the workforce
5. Post-Millennials or Gen Z (1995 – present) – currently 1%

Here are the general life experiences of each of these five groups and their resulting general preferences and tendencies in the workplace

1) "Traditional Workers" remember the Great Depression; World War II; the Cold War; Office machines; slide rules; and, assembly lines in industries. These experiences forged their view about the workplace and often expresses themselves in an orderly office structure; a tight chain of command; strict office hours; the belief that "you're lucky to have a job -- hang on to it"; strong loyalty to where you work; a belief that respect is earned over time; you learn by experience; and, life is not always fair – deal with it.

2) "Baby Boomers" grew-up under the Korean and Vietnam Wars; space race to the moon; Kennedy and Martin Luther King assassinations; civil rights movements; the "hippie" movement; Watergate; color television; calculators; and, multiple landline phones (home, office and pay or public). These experiences forged their view about the workplace and often expresses itself in their participatory or consensus leadership; collegial and friendly workplace relationships; desire to work face-to-face with people; expect rewards for hard work; want to change the world; want challenges to solve; and, don't like a poor work ethic in others. And, they have strong feelings that work should happen in the workplace, not at Starbucks.

3) "Gen X" workers grew-up under a time when the divorce rate tripled from the prior generation; the Challenger and Chernobyl incidents; AIDS epidemic; and, the arrival of regular use of PC's, video games, internet and cell phones. These experiences forged their view on the workplace and often expresses itself in independent thinking; fewer rules; use of technology; a belief that it doesn't matter when or where I work as long as I get the job done; a desire for a better work and life balance; want the latest technology; have fun in the workplace; and, like bonuses.

4) "Gen Y" workers grew-up under Columbine, Oklahoma City, 9/11 and other terrorists' threats; HDTV; I-pods; texting; and, social media. These experiences helped to forge their view on the workplace which often expresses itself in wanting to work in teams; wanting more information and data before deciding; a love of multi-tasking; work isn't everything; wanting mentors to help them; wanting respect immediately; wanting the newest technology; and, wanting interesting and challenging work.

5) "Gen Z" workers are motivated by social rewards, mentorship and constant feedback. They also want to be doing meaningful tasks and given responsibilities. Like the "Gen Y" and "X" they prefer flexible schedules. They expect structure, clear and directions and transparency.

With these differences in mind, realize that if you work for someone from another generation, they might not agree with your workplace expectations or values. That doesn't mean conflict is likely. If you know that different generations are likely (not always) to have different workplace expectations, be sure to discuss these subject with your boss or co-workers. By being clear about what they expect, you'll avoid misunderstandings which may impact your job performance.

4.) Diversity Patterns

We live in a world economy. The whole world is becoming more and more interconnected both in our commerce (business) as well as our communication (electronically or the internet). As a result, you should expect that your current or future workplace will have regular interactions with a very diverse range of ethnic and cultural co-workers and customers from all around the world. As a result, wherever you go to work, your company or organization will need its employees to know how to get the most out of this diversity.

To get you further along in this process and, in turn, more professional, here are some general tips about working with different ethnicities and cultures. Again, these are just tips. The key is to see the person beyond the label and to find a way to communicate effectively with them so that positive outcomes or results can happen for all concerned.

1. **Learn about your culture** – This seems odd. But, before you are truly able to open your mind and heart to other cultures, you need to first take stock of your own. By doing so, you'll begin to understand differences in a different light. Your cultural background is different – just like theirs.
2. **Examine your biases** – Often, based on limited knowledge and exposure, we have certain preconceived notions about other ethnicities or cultures. Often, these notions are both wrong and biased. Be honest with yourself and think about your biases, then challenge yourself by taking the next step (step 3 below).
3. **Meet people from other cultures** – Take every opportunity to meet people from cultures you may not know much about; and, maybe are uncomfortable with. One easy way to get started is to visit restaurants, fairs, or events associated with these cultures. Meeting these people will help you to learn more about their customs and traditions. You will get to see them as people, just like you – only different, just like you.
4. **Notice the differences** – As you begin to meet people from other groups, notice their communication styles, values and customs.
5. **Effectively Manage Diversity** – The final step in developing your diversity related professional skill is to understand how to utilize your new knowledge in getting better results for yourself and your company. This will help you make better decisions by have a broader perspective on how to solve problems and improve your performance.

5.) Gender Perspectives

Often (not always) men and women have different communication and problem solving styles. When these differences are better understood, we can better communicate with each other as well as learn the advantages of combine these slightly different styles on a gender diverse team. Remember, being one or the other style doesn't make someone better or worse, it just gives us another way to evaluate a situation. When these slight differences in gender perspective combine themselves, both genders can perform more effectively. One of the possible gender differences between women and men can be a heightened sense about what a person really means beyond the actual spoke words. Women often observe feelings or gestures as part of the communication. Not just what was said, but also what was unsaid. Men are more likely to be literal and take words spoken as the full meaning of the communication. When solving problems, women may delay a decision longer to get more data or information. Men might get to the apparent task sooner. Together, the team is stronger.

6.) Boss, Coworker, Customer Relationships

In the work place, there are three key groups of people which must work well together. They are your boss (and their bosses) your coworkers and the outside people your office serves -- such as customers, clients, or the general public.

Here are some basic tips on how you can develop a positive working relationship with your boss.

- ✓ Demonstrate loyalty and integrity – Through your actions and deeds always show your boss he or she can count on you to tell them the truth and that they can trust you to support them.
- ✓ Show respect – Even when the boss makes a mistake be gentle and understanding and never undermine or speak badly about the boss with others.
- ✓ Learn what the boss wants and needs you to do and strive to give it to them.
- ✓ Ask for advice. The boss' job is to help you do your job, so help them help you by asking questions, seeking advice or feedback on how to get your job done right.
- ✓ Don't waste their time. Respect the boss' time and be sure to research and properly prepare for you discussions with them.
- ✓ Make your boss look good. Give the boss credit for what you've accomplished, after all they hired you so that's a good reason to both give them credit and thank them.

Relationships with coworkers also demand positive working relationships. Your coworkers are the people you must depend on to get your work done right and on-time. They also want to be successful and get ahead in your organization. As a result, you'll want to be careful about how you relate to them. Some valuable strategies for getting along well with your co-workers are:

- ✓ Show an interest in them by asking them regularly how they're doing. If they have a problem listen to them and ask them how you might be able to help. Then, if you can, help them – even if it's just to check back with them to see if they've made any progress...
- ✓ Whenever you can, complement them about something good that they may have done. Giving complements encourages people to like you and want to return the favor,

- ✓ Whenever you talk about your co-workers to others be very careful not to say negative or critical things about them. This shows your professionalism as well as often set the stage for others to do likewise about you.
- ✓ And, share credit with your co-workers when getting credit. For example, in response to a complement you might say, "I could not have done it without the support of our human resource team members".

The third key group or workplace public that you must develop some ground rules around is with your company's or organization's customers, clients or the general public.

Here are some basic tips.

- ✓ Identify who you customers are. Both in a general sense and individually whenever possible.
- ✓ Talk with customers and listen to what they are saying about both your work and your company's work (analyze these comments as clues for improvements).
- ✓ Make your customers feel important – Respect them and say whenever you can "you're right", and "thank you". Make them feel important to you because they are.
- ✓ When you can, try and give your customers extra attention. Great service is the secret to better customer relations.

7.) Employment Opportunities

Job or career opportunities vary dramatically depending on time and place (current regional economic trends and realities). Not all localities have the same level of employment potential or variety of job opportunities, so where or in what geographic area you choose to look for work matters. Job opportunities also show themselves in patterns and variations. Sometimes, the job or career you want for yourself may not be possible in your town or location. In such cases, you may need to identify other localities to move to in order to find the right kind of job opportunities. Of course, you may choose to stay where you are and that's okay. It's just may be necessary for you think outside the "box" (or your current living location) in order to expand your employment options and opportunities. In general, the wider you cast your net for the job or career you want, the greater your potential to find and land that "dream job".

In addition, after a few years in your first or entry level job you'll probably want a promotion. You'll want to move-up the career ladder. It's a natural and important part of your career development. However, be alert. There are ever changing patterns when considering how to best navigate the promotion or career advancement landscape.

Often, it can be harder to get the promotion you may have both earned and are ready for at your current job. There are many reasons why this might be the case. One is they know you and you've already been doing the higher skilled work at the same pay level, so why spend more money on you now? Or, they are too busy with the day to day work to pay attention to this seemingly extra task to do. Or, giving you a promotion will start others wanting one also. What should you do? One way to break the log jam might be to look for that promotion elsewhere. Yes, apply for other jobs. The fact is when you find a job vacancy announcement at the next higher level the process is already in motion to find a

new worker at that level of responsibility (and pay). So, some of the inertia problems that existed in your current place of employment aren't present in these other places. If you are selected for this new job at the higher level, think about telling you current employer about this possible move away from them to the new position. The fact that you have a new job offer may break that "log jam" and push them to action to try and keep you. Of course, you should be careful about this strategy. You should be prepared to move-on if your current employer doesn't give you either a similar or better offer to stay. If they don't give you a counter offer, at least you'll know that a promotion where you currently are is not likely to happen and you probably should move-on if you want to keep moving-up. Also, be aware that if you current employer finds out that you're looking for work elsewhere, he or she may phase you out (even fire you). So, keep quiet about your job search until you actually have another job.