Avoiding Stereotypes in the Workplace

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A stereotype is a preconceived notion about a person or group of people where we sometimes unfairly believe that all people or things with a particular characteristic are the same. Promoting a non-discriminatory workplace with openness and acceptance of individual differences helps in preventing common negative effects caused by stereotyping.

Workplace

Negative Effects of Stereotypes

Some of the negative effects of stereotypes in the workplace include:

Conflict. Employees who act based on stereotypes rather than putting faith in the abilities and effort of co-workers impede progress.

Low morale. Stereotyping can cause low morale for the individual or group impacted and could potentially make for a toxic work environment. Employees who face constant comments, criticisms or other negative results from stereotyping can lose motivation and interest in performing their jobs.

Lower productivity and retention. Production and retention are likely to be lower if morale is low and individuals are not in a supportive, inclusive environment.

Litigation. The work environment should not accept discrimination or mistreatment based on personal qualities. The Human Resources department is responsible for investigating violations and enforcing fair policies in the workplace. There is always the potential that someone affected by discriminatory behaviors in the workplace will sue. This can be financially damaging for the business as well as the business' reputation.

Where Do Stereotypes Come From?

Stereotypes can easily form in our minds. As part of socialization in our cultures from personal experiences, media, peers and our family, we learn rules and expectations regarding who is given status and who isn't, who is capable and who isn't or even what is attractive and what isn't.

These stereotypes can be conscious (something that we are aware of) or unconscious. Universally, our brains are wired to create these stereotypes to make sense of the world and our place in it.

Stereotypes can often lead to prejudices—which are formed opinions about a person that are not based on actual experience or reason and could lead to favoring one person or group against another.

Remarks about race, politics, sex and gender are often based on the most common stereotypes. These stereotypes that we learned or observed when we were younger may have been wired into our brains, and as adults we then may bring the assumptions wherever we go even though they are not always acceptable or inclusive.

Consider the fact that most people have participated in prejudice and discrimination based upon stereotypes and also that we most likely fall into one of these stereotyped groups.

Addressing Stereotypes

Think about times that stereotypes might have impacted how you have treated someone or how you have been treated—whether it be at work, at home, at a store or in a social setting.

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Use the table below to think about what assumptions you have made or that others have made about you regarding stereotypes. Also consider what experiences or interactions made you create some of the stereotypes you have about others. Is there anyone that you know that has broken the "mold" of your stereotype?

Names I've been called or assumptions that have been made about me	Names I've called others or assumptions I have made about others
Time I was treated unfairly based on a stereotype	Times when I unfairly treated another person based on a stereotype

How to Avoid Stereotyping Others

- Get to know others who appear different from you.
- Stop yourself before making snap judgments about others.
- Consider what you have in common with other people—it may be more than you think!
- Develop empathy for others. Try to walk in their shoes.
- Educate yourself about different cultures and groups.

Key Takeaways

It is important to educate ourselves and continue to do self-assessments about our stereotypes and how they are potentially interfering with our interactions. Our professional and personal selves suffer when we judge people based on biases, labels and stereotypes. We could miss out on valuable experiences, insight and relationships—and connecting with others on a genuine level.

Sources:
http://www.hrvoice.org/avoiding-stereotypes-in-the-workplace/
http://smallbusiness.chron.com/stereotyping-affect-workplace-environment-78286.html