Diversity: Appreciating All of the Colors in Your Palette

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The only thing constant about life is change. From the time we are born, every day we encounter new experiences and new people. Embracing our differences can be difficult, and require more effort and accountability on our parts. Our worlds are comfortable, and learning about new ones take work and effort. But often, we are faced with that “uncomfortability” when it comes closer to home. We move into new housing, children and grandchildren become involved with people who we were trained to think a certain way about, coworkers express differing beliefs.

Open minds are the first step to embracing differences and appreciating all of the beautiful colors in our palette of life.

This workshop is not intended to make people experts but more to shine a light on how our differences can be a great thing.
As co-op volunteers and professionals in the housing industry, we are very familiar with fair housing laws and protected classes. The Federal Fair Housing Act provides protections based on Race, Sex, Color, Familial Status, National Origin, Disability, Religion.

Often times people in these groups do not have access to housing, quality education, health care and other basic needs. As cooperators, it is in our principles to believe in the diversity of our members and treat all members with respect. We must strive to be consistent in our standards, policies, and in the treatment of our members to promote fairness and equality.
Baby Boomers are defined as a generation whose individuals born between 1946 and 1964.

If you were born in that time, you probably remember how very different the world looked. Your world looked.

While In 1946, the average price of a gallon of gas was only 21 cents a gallon, did you know that voting rights for black people were not protected against discrimination until almost 20 years later in 1965?

Jewish people were under “deed restrictions” that prohibited home ownership in certain areas until the 1960s?

Many people in this room remember these things. Which leads us to the question of WHY?
Why are we so uncomfortable with our differences? How can we deal with people who look and seem so different?

• Look for ties that bind.
  o Music
  o Food
  o Sports
  o Existing friends

• Accept what you have been taught or raised to believe is not always true.

• Be open to new experiences.

• Don’t force your way of life on others.
  o Does not always work well and you may shun people you care about

• Remember we are all human beings.
Activity: How Comfortable Am I?

Please read the handout and answer honestly. There are no right or wrong answers. This exercise is designed to get you to think. You do not have to share or present your answers.
# How Comfortable Am I?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene Description</th>
<th>Not Comfortable at All</th>
<th>Uneasy</th>
<th>Fairly Comfortable</th>
<th>Completely Comfortable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A woman wearing a headscarf is walking her dog on your street.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A same sex couple share a kiss in the grocery store.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>A homeless man approaches you and asks for change.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your new board member speaks with a Korean accent.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>A group of young black men are walking toward you.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You overhear your property manager speaking Spanish to a member.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your sister invites her new boyfriend to dinner and he tells you he is transgender.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The woman sitting next to you on the bus weighs 275 lbs.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your new next-door neighbors are lesbians.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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</table>
Languages, Dialects and Accents

What is the official language of the United States?

The United States does not have an official language. It was designed to be a nation of immigrants. However, immigration reform has become a political lightning rod recently. As co-op members and/or co-op employees, we must make sure that we are treating everyone the same regardless of their background, language, dialect, national origin or other distinguishing features.

Members who speak languages other than English are welcomed in our co-op family. Open and Voluntary Membership without discrimination is the first cooperative principle.
Political Correctness

Terminology and the way we address people is important. Learning how to address people can go a long way.

• When in doubt, ask.
  o It is ok to respectfully ask someone how they would like to be addressed.
• Realize not all people of Latin descent are Mexicans.
  o There are many Spanish speaking countries all over the world.
• Slang can be taken out of context.
  o Avoid colloquialisms with people you do not know.
People of Color

Melanin is a dark biological pigment that gives human skin, hair and eyes their color. People of color have larger amounts of melanin which creates different darker hues and distinguishing characteristics. Race has been a difficult topic in America since its inception and independence from England in 1776. People of color around the world originated from “the cradle of civilization” which is now known as the Middle East in Northern Africa. Africans were captured, enslaved and became the driving force behind this country’s new economy. People literally were property and unable to marry, raise their own children and vote. The horrors they were subjected to still have ripple effects that show in the African American community to this day.

However, African Americans are Americans and African American history is American history. It is important that the stories of the past be shared in the present and the atrocities slaves experienced never repeated in the future. African Americans fought to survive and bring traditions like hair braiding, music and food preparations with them along the way.
Islam

Islam is the second largest religion in the world. People who believe in Islam are called Muslims. There are over 1.6 billion practicing Muslims all over the world. The word Islam comes from a root word that means *peace*. Violent, radical Muslims, like violent, radical Christians, do not represent what the essence of those faiths embody.

Many Muslim women cover their hair in public as a sign of respect and modesty to their God, Allah. There are several types of head coverings that women can choose to wear as a sign of reverence.
LGBTQ+

Gay rights have come a long way from when you were children. Homosexuals can now get married and have legal rights as spouses. While everyone has the right to refer to themselves as they prefer, here are some the meanings behind the acronym LGBTQ+.

Lesbian
Gay
Bisexual
Transgender
Queer/Questioning

The plus includes anyone who feels LGBTQ does not necessarily describe them. It is designed to make everyone feel included.
LESBIAN
A woman whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction is to other women. Some lesbians may prefer to identify as gay or as gay women.

BISEXUAL
A person who has the capacity to form enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attractions to those of the same gender or to those of another gender. People may experience this attraction in differing ways and degrees over their lifetime.

GAY
The adjective used to describe people whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attractions are to people of the same sex.

TRANSGENDER
An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth.
QUEER
An adjective used by some people, particularly younger people, whose sexual orientation is not exclusively heterosexual. Once considered a negative term, queer has been reclaimed by some LGBT people to describe themselves; however, it is not a universally accepted term even within the LGBT community.

QUESTIONING
Sometimes, when the Q is seen at the end of LGBT, it can also mean questioning. This term describes someone who is questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity.
It is ok to feel uncomfortable with things that do not go along with what is familiar to us. Do not let being uncomfortable prevent you from trying new foods, meeting new members or involving yourself in co-op or family activities.

Challenge yourself to learn new things about people who don’t look or sound like you. In the end, you will find that you are more alike then you could ever know. It is never too late to change your focus and open your mind. One step at a time. One experience at a time. You will be glad you did.
A Box of Crayons

While walking in a toy store The day before today, I overheard a crayon box With many things to say. “I don’t like red!” said yellow. And green said, “Nor do I!” And no one here likes orange, But no one knows quite why.” “We are a box of crayons that really doesn’t get along,” Said blue to all the others “Something here is wrong!” Well, I bought that box of crayons and took it home with me and laid out all the crayons so the crayons could see. They watched me as I colored with red and blue and green and black and white and orange and every color in between.

They watched as green became the grass and blue became the sky. The yellow sun was shining bright on white clouds drifting by. Colors changing as they touched, becoming something new. They watched me as I colored. They watched till I was through. And when finally finished, I began to walk away. And as I did the crayon box Had something more to say... “I do like red! said the yellow. And green said, “so do I!” “And blue you are terrific so high up in the sky. “ We are a box of crayons, each of us unique, but when we get together, the picture is complete!

If we learn from this box of crayons, this world and our co-ops will be a better place!