

## ***Diversity: Embracing our Differences***

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Most people would agree with the basic premise that we are all different. Just like snowflakes, no two human beings are exactly alike. While we may share common interests, characteristics or habits, every one of us remains unique. Even identical twins grow up as separate individuals with distinct personalities.

Yes, most of us would agree that everyone is different. So, why do we expect people to think, feel and act the same way we do? We may even consider it a personal affront when they don't. In fact, sometimes we react as if people were deliberately trying to make our lives difficult by not conforming to our view of the world or our way of doing things. Each new generation of teenagers, for example, demonstrates this reality over again for each new generation of parents.

My 17 year old daughter and I have a lot in common: we share physical features, our gender, a house, a family, a culture, a nation, and a number of basic philosophical principles. I am certain, however, that her definition of housekeeping either originated on another planet or is specifically calculated to trigger my maximum stress response. She, on the other hand, insists that I am the one with the problem, because I'm too picky and prefer not to use the floor as a clothing rack. As someone who is comfortable with clutter, she has no desire or need to organize her space. Neither will I begin to hang my clothes on the floor, because I prefer order and tidiness around me. This situation has the capacity to blow up into major conflict if we don't find a way to accept and accommodate our differences.

You likely have similar stories. If it's not the child in your home, it's the unreasonable parent, the frustrating co-worker, or the impossible boss. Some of us are unlucky enough to have the full set! In each case, it seems that these people want to be disagreeable, annoying and argumentative. Or, could it be that they just see the world from a different angle? Could they be laid-back clothes on the floor people bumping up against our everything in its place mentality....or vice versa?

The critical question is this: if we have difficulty understanding and accommodating differences among people who have so much in common with us, how much more likely is it that we may fail to respect the clear differences of those who do not share our culture, spiritual beliefs, lifestyle or abilities? If our homes can become battlefields over degrees of neatness, is it any wonder our world becomes a war zone over differing principles and life choices?

In the newspapers, on TV and in our schools we hear a lot of talk about diversity and about how important it is to be accepting of different cultures, spiritual beliefs, lifestyles and abilities. This is all valid, necessary information. But honouring diversity is more fundamental than recognizing and embracing different groupings of people. To truly understand and connect with people, we need to accept and act on what we have always known – that every single person is unique. When we look beneath the natural human tendency to form groups based on commonalities we discover individuals. And we all think, feel, and act in the way that works best for us, not to deliberately frustrate those around us. The simple truth is that we are all different and the differences are real.

If we start by embracing this reality, that people are fundamentally different in many ways, rather than expecting people to model our view of the world, then we can realize the value of many perspectives and reap the benefit of many skill sets. We can begin to draw on the infinite potential of the human race that only comes from collaboration and synergy. The first step in healing the many ills of our world is realizing that we have all the knowledge, ability, and wisdom we need within us. We each hold a different piece. No two pieces are identical. We are the puzzle and the only way we can complete it and find the answers we need for our world is by understanding that the differences are what make the puzzle, and us, whole.