DIVERSITY: THE NEW NORMAL

I want to take a moment to wish you a happy and healthy new year, and share our excitement about what 2013 holds. Last year was a turning point for our nation, and particularly for the leaders of diversity and inclusion in global companies. It was the year that the United States rounded the corner – and officially became a nation without a singular religious majority. Indeed, the very face of our historically white Protestant nation is changing. A Pew study found that Protestants make up less than half of our population – a first. In 2012, racial and ethnic minorities also made up more than half of the children born in the U.S., again a first in American history. For those of us who believe that addressing our differences is a responsibility and that drawing on them is an asset, these recent studies merely confirm our long held hypothesis: diversity of all kinds is increasingly becoming our reality and cannot be ignored.

At Tanenbaum, we often characterize religion as the stepchild of the diversity movement. It's an area of diversity and inclusion that workplaces often ignore or underestimate. That's why we work to increase awareness and to integrate that core identity into workplaces' diversity and inclusion strategies. But as I take a moment to reflect on this past year, I've asked myself - what role do demographic shifts play in understanding religious diversity in the United States?

Forty years ago, employers operated from the assumption that their employee and customer bases followed a Christian norm. Offices closed for Christmas while the Eid and Yom Kippur were just foreign sounding words. Today, employers are more aware and more conscientious. Religious identities are often closely entwined with other salient identities such as race and ethnicity. All of these identities intersect, inform, and influence one another.

Mark Fowler, Managing Director of Programs at Tanenbaum, conducts a diversity and inclusion training workshop.

These considerations make the work we do more complex – but also more valuable. What is the experience of an African American Muslim mother in your workplace? What role does religion play in your efforts to cultivate leadership in racial minorities?

It is clear to me that the workforce can no longer be viewed in simple dichotomies: the majority and the minority; the Christian and non-Christian; the white and non-white; the abled and the disabled, etc. These lines blur as we continue to expand our definitions of diversity and inclusion in an effort to fully understand the many opportunities that increased diversity brings. Equally significant, in the workplace, employers have a unique legal obligation to define religious identity broadly. Federal law not only protects those who belong to traditional, familiar, organized religions, but also those who have "sincerely held religious, ethical or moral beliefs." With an increase in religiously diverse employees showing up in the workplace, employers have begun to face complicated questions:

- Where does culture end and religion begin?

- How do they intersect?

- How can we support such a broadly defined group through our diversity initiatives?

Around the globe, religion continues to be a powerful and complicated force. Religious identities permeate every walk of life – affecting anything from an individual's work schedule, to the way a man introduces himself, to a woman's interactions with gay and lesbian colleagues.

> " **...the very face of our historically white Protestant nation is changing.**

In the spirit of the new year, we've featured a version of our "Religious Diversity Checklist" in this issue to provide you with an opportunity to reflect on how your organization currently addresses aspects of religious diversity.

As you read through this checklist, consider how policies and practices around religion can impact all employees – not just those employees who outwardly identify as religious or devout. Our better practices, such as providing flexible time-off policies and a space to quietly reflect, are intended to support all employees regardless of the many ways they may identify.

We understand that creating a culture of respect and inclusion is an ongoing journey. As Corporate Members, Tanenbaum will work to provide you with better practices throughout the year to support you in this process. This checklist, in particular, is a useful annual exercise. It will help you identify areas to address with Tanenbaum's consulting team as you plan for 2013.

In Friendship,

Joyce S. Dubensky

Joyce S. Dubensky, CEO

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY CHECKLIST

Policies

❑ Does your company have an official policy regarding diversity?

❑ Does your company's diversity policy specifically include religious diversity?

❑ Does your company have a method of communicating this policy to employees and the public (through employee handbooks, information packets, intranet, email, etc.)?

❑ Do you know the general religious demographics of your employees?

Holidays/Time Off

❑ Does your company have a clearly articulated policy regarding religious holiday leave (paid or unpaid)?

❑ Is this policy clearly explained to employees (in employee handbooks, information packets, intranet, email, job offers, etc.)?

❑ Do you have an avenue of communication between employees and management to address scheduling conflicts resulting from religious needs and to find co-workers who can cover or switch shifts?

❑ Does management take into account employees' various religious holidays when planning meetings, workshops, trips, dinners, etc.?

Dress

- ☐ Does your company have a dress code?
- ☐ Is this dress code communicated to all employees (through employee handbooks, information packets, intranet, email job offers, etc.)?
- ☐ If an employee's religious practice conflicts with the dress code, does the company have policies in place regarding attire accommodations?
- ☐ Do employees know what avenues are available to them for communicating with management regarding their special religious attire needs?

Food

- ☐ Does your company provide food for employees (in the cafeteria, through an office discount meal program, etc.)?
- ☐ Do these meals accommodate unique religious and ethical needs of your employees (kosher, halal, vegetarian, etc.)?
- ☐ Does your company hold special events involving food and/or drink (banquets, dinner meetings, cocktail parties, etc.)?
- ☐ Do these special events accommodate the unique religious and ethical needs of your employees (kosher, halal, vegetarian, etc.)?

Employee Networks

- ☐ Does your company allow the formation of on-site employee resource groups (employee networks)?
- ☐ Does your company allow the formation of on-site religion-based employee resource groups?
- ☐ Does your company clearly communicate the policy regarding these groups and their relationship to the company as a whole (whether through employee handbooks, information packets, intranet, email, job offers, etc.)?

Office Space

- ☐ Does your company have a policy regarding decoration of one's personal workspace (within one's office/cubicle, walls in public areas, the employee lounge, etc.)?
- ☐ Does this policy include religious decoration(s)?
- ☐ Does your company clearly explain this policy to employees (through employee handbooks, information packets, intranet, email, job offers, etc.)?
- ☐ Does your company allow special decoration of office space for holidays (Christmas party decorations, Hanukkah decorations, etc.)?
- ☐ Do these decorations accommodate the needs of a religiously and culturally diverse employee base?
- ☐ Do your employees have avenues to communicate their reactions to these decorations?

Religious Practice

- ☐ Does your company allow religious practice in the workplace (prayer, meditation, etc.)?
- ☐ Does your company effectively communicate its policy regarding religious practice in the workplace to employees (through employee handbooks, information packets, intranet, email, job offers, etc.)?
- ☐ Do your employees have avenues of communication by which they can express their specific religious practice needs?

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COMBATING RELIGIOUS PREJUDICE