

USING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION TO GROW YOUR WORKPLACE GROUP Page 1

Soon after Josh joined the leadership team of the Christian group, he approached HR for permission to publicise the Christian network across the company (a big 4 bank). The group currently attracted 8 members to its regular meetings and he wanted to grow it.

His initial request was denied. But Josh pushed back and used the organisation's diversity and inclusion^{*1} policies to embolden his argument. He used the phrase "help me to understand ... why we can't do it if they can ..." (citing other faith groups who had publicised Diwali and Ramadan). Eventually HR agreed that the group could send a message letting the whole company know about the group.

The effect was immediate: 15,000 people viewed the message (half the company), 165 people reacted to it, 71 people commented with positive support, 70 new people wanted to be added to the Email list. Their regular prayer meeting swelled to around 50 people.

The lesson is clear. Diversity and inclusion policies, and other company structures such as events committees, can be used to grow your Christian workplace group and give more people in your workplace the opportunity to hear the good news of Jesus.

This article shares a few basic tips on how to approach HR and leverage diversity and inclusion (D&I) policies to grow your group. This article won't cover the challenging issue of whether Christians should participate in D&I sponsored causes such as, *Wear it Purple Day*^{*2}. We are focusing rather on the positive opportunities that D&I presents.

1. HAVE REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

It is unlikely that your Christian network will be granted the same level of exposure as popular social causes such as LGBTQI+, Gender equality, Indigenous, Disability etc.^{*3}

However, you don't have to become a fully fledged, company championed, D&I recognised group in order to enjoy some of the benefits of D&I policies. For example, you might just want to use the company communications channels occasionally to let the whole organisation know that your group exists or to advertise Easter and Christmas events. I have also heard of Christian groups submitting articles for the company newsletter around Easter or Christmas, with a personal story of how their families celebrate these religious festivals, a positive message of hope and contact details. Be realistic in what you are asking for.

A few years ago the In house Christian group at the Commonwealth Bank in Sydney applied for, and received, official recognition as a group under the Mosaic Cultural Diversity network. They were allowed to book rooms, use the company communication channels and were given a budget to pay for catering, speaker's fees etc. for special events. Probably the biggest advantage was to hold their events under the Mosaic Cultural Diversity banner, making it easier to invite guests along.

During the Covid pandemic, when the virus was wreaking havoc in India, the Christian group of a large multinational company based in Australia, was granted permission to organise an Interfaith prayer event for the whole office to pray for India and work colleagues there.

This event was given the green light because prayers were said by people from multiple faiths – Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim and Christian. 75 colleagues attended this event and the feedback was very positive. A non Christian manager commented privately to the leader of the Christian group that the Christian prayer stood out as being the most personal and touching.

2. PREPARE WELL WHEN APPROACHING HR

- a. A pack to present to management might include:
 - i. **The case** for your group to become an officially recognised group, including: statistics (for example 80% of the world claims some sort of religious affiliation⁴), existing activities showing there is interest, how your group will help Christians bring their whole self to work, activities are open to everyone and other companies with similar groups.
 - ii. The broad **purpose** of your group using words that will appeal to management (e.g. using terms from the company's Values). For example: *The Company X Christian network seeks to help Christian believers live out their faith at work with integrity and respect, and to be a blessing to all people at Company X.*
 - iii. Proposed **activities**. For example: Bible discussions, prayer meetings, Christmas and Easter events, social events.
 - iv. Relationships with **other groups**. Are there other employee networks in your company with which you might build mutually beneficial relationships? For example, helping a charity.
 - v. **External partners**. For example citybibleforum.org, explaining how they can assist (study resources, speakers for events, peer support with leaders from other companies etc.).
 - vi. **Resources** request eg. access to communication channels, money for events catering and to pay speakers, room bookings, technical help for events, a mention on the website.
- b. Try to find **an executive** who is positively disposed to, and supportive of your group. He or she might also be able to help you frame your case, point you to the right people to approach and participate in some of your events.
- c. **Pray for humility, respect but also boldness**. Prepare well and present your best case confidently, but with respect. Remember that God is in control and we can leave the outcome to Him.

Here is an example of a respectful email to HR in one of the big banks asking to set up an online prayer group using the bank's internal comms system

Firstly, thank you for championing inclusion and diversity across [company name]. I believe that [company name] represents the best of Australian society as a diverse corporate entity which allows its people to bring their full selves to work. We are all aware that diverse organisations experience greater levels of success where their diversity is a strength.

There are many [company name] employees who are active in the Christian faith. In the past we would have small prayer groups where we would come together, meet in fellowship and pray for each other, our leaders, our customers and [company name].

I'd like to create a group on perhaps Yammer / Teams to facilitate this virtually, I thought to check in first before proceeding. Are there any protocols I need to be aware of?

NB. He received a positive and warm response from HR to proceed

IN CONCLUSION

Approaching HR and leveraging D&I requires courage, time and wisdom, but the results can be spectacular.

Remember the story of Josh approaching HR at the beginning of this article? Look how delighted people were to hear that a Christian network existed in their company.

- *When I saw this in 'Updates from All Company', which I admit I typically don't pay as much attention to as I could, to say I was delighted is an understatement!*
- *I never knew a Christian network, let alone prayer groups, existed and it's so encouraging to see! Please send me the invite :)*
- *I would love to join...please forward all future invites to me if you can please...I will attend as many as I can :)*
- *I never realised there was even a Christian network in our company... what a wonderful initiative! Please send me the recurring invite.*
- *This is just WOW! I didn't realise we had a prayer group. God Bless.*

Would you consider praying and planning to approach HR in your workplace?

FOR MORE INFORMATION and resources to help you, contact craig.josling@citybibleforum.org

NOTES

*1 **Definitions** (from the Suncorp D&I policy)

Diversity is “The variety of difference between people in our organisation. It includes characteristics such as: age; gender; family responsibilities; relationship status; race; religious belief; cultural identity and background; ethnicity; sexual orientation; gender identity; intersex status; socio-economic background; physical and intellectual ability; caring status; Indigenous background; and English language skills.”

Inclusion describes an environment where everyone is able to be themselves and feel valued, involved and respected for their perspectives and contributions

<https://www.suncorpgroup.com.au/uploads/Diversity-and-Inclusion-Policy-External.pdf>

*2 **Wear it Purple Day** is an annual LGBTIQ+ awareness day.

*3 It is difficult in Australia for faith groups to become one of the officially sponsored causes of companies (ie. prominently displayed on their websites and promoted) . For example to become an officially recognised Employee Action Group at Westpac you need executive sponsorship.

In the USA there are more examples of Faith being one of the major D&I pillars. See [Faithforce](#) for example in the US based company Salesforce.

Another thing to keep in mind is that if you wanted to apply to become one of the company’s major diversity networks, it would probably have to be under the banner of *all* faiths or a broader cultural group. Companies are wary of supporting one particular faith over another. You would likely be asked to present a submission for all the faith groups (Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish). Working harmoniously with these other faith groups, and for the Christian message to be heard and appreciated above the clamour of competing religious voices, will be challenging but not impossible.

*4 <https://hbr.org/2020/12/creating-space-for-religious-diversity-at-work>

OTHER ARTICLES ON D&I

<https://www.dca.org.au/research/project/creating-inclusive-multi-faith-workplaces>

<https://www.dca.org.au/blog/religious-inclusion-why-its-important-and-how-get-it>

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/01/religion-diversity-business-inclusion/>

<https://diversityq.com/faith-is-the-forgotten-di-characteristic-1512592/>

<https://religiousfreedomandbusiness.org/salesforce-has-a-faithforce>