Chapter 1

Beware of Noah's Ark

Two women, two Asians, two people with disabilities, and two African Americans: diversity accomplished—or so we once thought. At some point, corporate diversity came to mean the inclusion of at least *two of every kind*. Far too many managers and leaders figured that if you crammed a pair of each minority into a company or into a boardroom, you had accomplished the task of creating a diverse work environment.

Nothing, in fact, could be further from reality. We've thought long and erroneously that diversity was achieved merely by re-creating Noah's ark. At least, that's how the thinking has gone. The push for diversity came to be about numbers, committees, employee networks, and mission statements; strategic plans, tracking systems, business cases, and scorecards. It's true that in Noah's ark,

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those might all be necessary; but we've come to find that they are not sufficient.

The problem with this artificial ark is that much of the time, the giraffe looks at the zebra and thinks—consciously or unconsciously—"That animal is just kind of funny looking. He doesn't look like me. He has a foolishly short neck, silly black and white stripes, and eats what looks like garbage. However, as a giraffe, I have an elegant long neck, beautiful brown and white spots, and eat carefully; only the finest leaves and bark." And that's just the beginning of how all of these creatures see each other. The gazelle inevitably thinks that the hippo is ridiculously fat and lazy; the leopard finds the stripes on the tiger jarring; the rabbits and the coyotes can't be in the same room together, and the racket the magpies make during the day incenses the nocturnal owls.

This is what happens when you create the corporate version of Noah's ark; and such clashes will happen indefinitely until leaders and companies come up with a plan for integrating these groups, and benefiting from the stripes, the spots, and the horns rather than waiting for company-wide conformity. It will continue to take place until everyone in the workplace learns and understands that their own inherent behaviors and unconscious approaches are likely hindering success for everyone. In a true meritocracy, the benefit of diversity will emerge only when we become aware and conscious of how we feel about the *other* who is sharing our space in the ark. It

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will occur when we become aware of the subtle ways in which some in the ark are advantaged while others are disadvantaged—merely because of their diversity. Only then can we understand how the beliefs, roles, shoulds, should nots, values, schemas, and archetypes that we bring into the workplace affect one another.

In the United States, the corporate Noah's ark still has only 13 female CEOs running the largest 500 publicly traded companies—that's a record. In 1996 there was a mere one female CEO of a Fortune 500 company; in 2008 there were 11. As for African American men, there are four currently running a Fortune 500 company. This book isn't all about gender or race, but this will give you an idea of how far we haven't come and how far we still have to go.

Journalist James Surowiecki captures an important point about diversity in his book, *The Wisdom of Crowds*. He says that what we are really looking for is "cognitive diversity," or the differing ways people think. He explains that if you have a homogeneous group and you add an additional member of the homogeneous group to the mix, the individuals will bond quickly because they are alike—but the incremental creativity between them is slight. If you add a member of the heterogeneous group to the homogeneous one, they do *not* bond quickly, because although they are not alike, the incremental creativity is much greater when each group reaches its full potential. Companies are ultimately looking for increased creativity,

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better ideas, and multiple perspectives, so they will in fact benefit from diversity. However, we will see that achieving this takes much more effort than merely assembling a workplace that looks like Noah's ark.

We now need to move beyond diversity. Gone are the days of traditional diversity training—something that ultimately proved to be ineffective. We have to look at companies and employees in a new postdiversity way. A review of 830 mid- to large-sized companies around the United States found that typical diversity training exercises were followed by a 7.5 percent drop in the number of women in management. The number of female African American managers fell by 10 percent, while the number of male African Americans dropped by 12 percent. This study—examined by the *Washington Post* in "Most Diversity Training Ineffective, Study Finds"—revealed that mandatory diversity training programs were the culprits. Trainings that concerned diversity were found to be more effective when they were voluntary and used to achieve specific company goals.

Businesses in the United States collectively spend between $200 and $300 million each year on diversity training; yet all that time and money could be spent more effectively to achieve more productive results. We are asking people within a diverse population to change their unconscious thoughts, beliefs, schemas, perceptions, role types, and behaviors, while acting more consciously among and around others who are not like them. It makes existence

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in heterogeneous workplaces more complex, and it makes fair career success more challenging. Changes in perceptions and beliefs about ourselves and others in the ark are required, and we all know that people are reluctant to change. It can be scary, uncertain, and uncomfortable. Successful and effective change starts with the unthinkable, moves to the impossible, and ends with the inevitable. But too often, we become stuck in the unthinkable.

Ancient Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus said, "The worst crimes were dared by a few, willed by more and accepted by all." The same goes for change; a small group dares it before more join in and ultimately it is accepted by everyone. A standing ovation is a classic metaphor for change. Typically, an initial but small number of people jump up to yell "bravo"; then another larger group stands believing that the performance was especially worthwhile; followed by an even larger crowd that gets up, believing that the performance was good based on how others are receiving it. Finally, the people remaining in their seats stand up because they can't see the stage and have no other choice.

People need to realize that creating diverse environments is, in effect, all about change. This is inherently difficult to grasp. There has historically been more resistance than acceptance to these changes. None of us feel excited and happy when we see competition, threats to our job, challenges to our thinking, or creativity that surpasses

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our own. These can be scary things, but change can be less painful than we think. Another ancient philosopher, Thucydides, observed that people end up changing for three reasons: out of fear, self-interest, or honor. I like to think of these, in modern terms, as pain, gain, or vision. I may change because it is too painful to stay the way I am. I may even change because it is clear that I will gain from the change. Least likely, I will change because I have the vision to understand that it is in everyone's best interest for me to change.

Once we've assembled Noah's ark, we can't stop there. That is merely Diversity 1.0. We must go to the next level and require ourselves to be more conscious about our actions and decisions while changing—if not at first adjusting—our perspectives, beliefs, and most importantly, our behaviors in the workplace. A successful corporate Noah's ark is a lot harder to achieve than we imagine, because there are far more categories of difference, or diversity, that trigger our unconscious reactions. The categories extend beyond the traditionally defined distinctions that include age, race, gender, national origin, and religion. Try to discern the myriad unconscious assumptions we make about personal characteristics such as marital status, family structure, sexual orientation, belief systems, height, weight, accent, hobbies, sports, country of origin, class, smoking habits, food preferences, personality approaches, gradations of skin color, and speaking styles. These are all distinct types

found on the ark. True diversity requires that we tackle these subtle and unique categories head on. Each one must be incorporated into the ark and into the corporate composition. Yet, it is challenging to overcome our own natural or learned perceptions of each of these groups, because we learn about others starting at an early age, and this learning continues throughout our lives.

Let's look at who is in this ark I keep mentioning. The issue as we look inside the ark isn't merely that difference *exists*, but rather that we *evaluate* people unconsciously. This can have a real impact in the workplace on promotions, salaries, and performance metrics. It can disturb the professional playing field, *not* because of the diversity in the ark, but because of how we respond to individuals who are different than we are. Some specific examples follow. This is not an exhaustive list by any means.

National Origin. We may be pleased that our company has hired people from various countries of origin, but we should really be focusing on how everyone is reacting to each other. We can use a word like *nationality*, but what this really means is that people have their own notions or ideas about each other's country of origin. What do the French really think of the English? What do we do about the Japanese attitude toward the Chinese? What about the ways in which Italians view Germans? If you ask someone their honest opinion regarding national origins, you are sure to hear quite a commentary, quite a host of assumptions, predictions, and decisions. Germans

are too stolid and too unemotional, think the Italians. Italians are much too emotional, heated, and dramatic, think the Germans. Herein lies the Noah's ark challenge.

Age. It is not so much that age is an issue, a problem, or an obstacle, but rather that we have to be aware of what we unconsciously believe about what 20-year-olds can do, what 40-year-olds are capable of, and what 60-year-olds are really all about. We may believe that the millennial generation or 20-somethings are unfocused, not particularly loyal to one organization, and have short attention spans. Don't even try to give them critical feedback, since those helicopter parents of theirs never did. Many have decided that millennials use electronic media such as Facebook in a way that dissolves the lines between personal and professional, and we probably don't like it. But we are doing an individual a disservice, our company harm, and ourselves unnecessary angst by forming these judgments about the 20 something who was just hired. It's not uncommon to assume that the 55-year-old is stuck in her ways and unwilling to make adjustments. Maybe she is, but maybe she isn't.

Culture. This really boils down to how we live in the world and how that may be different from another person's way of being or doing things. Our cultural differences are often labeled as weird or strange, rather than viewed as merely not the same as our own. "You eat that part of the animal?" we think to ourselves watching someone savor a particular organ. Maybe we're judging our colleagues

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because they kiss each cheek when greeting someone, or hold hands. "That's so not right," we think. Nor is that little ritual we saw before a meal, the small bow to a superior, or a phrase used for greeting someone that isn't "Hello." It's hard not to think, "We don't do that here." In order to make Noah's ark work, more of us have to accept that what we do *here* isn't what we've always done, and if it's different it doesn't necessarily mean it's bad. That's cultural difference in a microcosm.

Religion. If we share the same religion as another person, then we have a sense of each other's values in terms of what, where, why, whom, and when we believe. In turn, we are comfortable in the knowledge that we understand one another. To know is to understand, to feel comfortable, to feel right, and to feel okay about our cubicle neighbor, our supervisor, or our newly hired charge. If we don't share the same religion, we really do not understand each other very well. Our value system—and certainly our rituals—may be different. It may not be a clash of civilizations, but it is a clash of unconscious understandings that quickly plays out in the workplace.

Say, for instance, that your boss likes to take people out for drinks on Fridays after work as a team bonding experience. Immediately this seemingly thoughtful, spirited gesture includes certain people and excludes others. Jews who observe the Sabbath or Muslims who do not drink and may be uncomfortable in a bar setting are automatically excluded. And this doesn't take into consideration

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the person who has adult- or child-care responsibilities. So a manager's perfectly good impulse to create a strong team and get familiar with her colleagues turns into a subtle advantage for those who participate, and a subtle disadvantage for others in Noah's ark who are not out for drinks at the end of the week. What are the effects of this potentially unequal treatment? The ones who go out with the manager have unequal access to the manager—the same person who ultimately makes career decisions about others naturally and unconsciously leans toward the people he or she has become comfortable with after hours.

Holidays are another factor. If we share the same religion, we know each other's holidays—including the dates, the celebrations, and the meanings. You'd have to have been born in a cave not to know about Christmas in the Western world, and I'm sure you've casually wished many people a Merry Christmas. But what about the 1.5 billion Muslims who celebrate the holiday of Ramadan, which is less known in many places around the world, and not even acknowledged in some.

Gender. What do we bring to our place of work that we learned long ago about gender—about men and women? Ben Barres tells of an experience that he had as a transgender individual. Barres—who went from being a female to being a male—discusses a science presentation he made after which he overheard a male scientist say, "Ben gave a great seminar today, but his work is much better than his sister's work." The male scientist had initially seen

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Ben give his presentation as a female. I am sure that although much had changed about Ben, his scientific research hadn't. This man had brought his unconscious way of hearing, thinking, and perceiving to the lecture. Men gave better presentations, in his opinion. As a male, Ben says that he is also interrupted much less often than when he was a female.

Sexual Orientation. It may depend upon what our belief system has taught us, or what our parents said, or how our childhood peers informed us, but we all come to the table with a set of ideas on how we think about gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and the transgendered. We may be less comfortable talking to the woman who is married to another woman when we're looking for a colleague with whom to bounce ideas around. A male supervisor may have decided—as many men do—that his gay project manager will think he's hitting on him for suggesting the two get lunch to talk over some strategies for an upcoming presentation. Therefore, the supervisor falls back to relying on the person who is more like him, altogether missing out on hearing from those particular employees.

A manager may not really get to know an employee who is gay through casual postweekend chitchat. A simple question such as, "What did you do this weekend?" may never transpire. Likewise, when assumptions are made about sexual orientation, a gay employee who is not "out" may end up avoiding questions—stumbling through

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seemingly simple exchanges about weekend plans and end up not connecting at all—in an effort to hide his identity. This becomes a missed opportunity for an employee and manager to bond over small things, and ultimately that manager will be influenced by the lack of those small, pleasant exchanges. In the end, decisions are based on both conscious and unconscious knowledge, which leaves some with a significant advantage and others with a clear disadvantage.

Socioeconomics or Class. This category crosses over many cultural, racial, and religious boundaries. Think about how class affects perceptions of who people are, and what they are capable of achieving. We all have an internal compass about class; it's one category that quickly separates the haves from the have-nots. Elite blacks, whites, Chileans, and Chinese, for example, can often find common humor, talk about similar cars, homes, or vacations, and may have similar preferences in the arts. This is the phenomenon known as "Davos Man," and is a commonality based on class, not geography. Money divides like nothing else. Often when I am in India and ask about the different categories of diversity in the company ark, one of the first responses is *caste*—a word that would be unthinkable in many other places globally, but quite prevalent there in unconscious and conscious thought.

I once asked a company director to explain the dress code in the company. The answer was simple for him in

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his world; he told me that it was "country-club casual." I come from a blue-collar background, and my father was a policeman. I've long been working in the white-collar world, but my first exposure to country-club dress codes came when I waited on tables and picked up golf balls at the club near where I grew up. Without those jobs, I wouldn't have been able to decipher country-club casual. For employees from other countries and class backgrounds, this is useless information that reflects a certain unaware, insider mind-set.

Take another example of two people interviewing for a position in the same organization. One candidate comes from a well-to-do family and is accustomed to reading the *New York Times* every day. While he was growing up, his parents invited interesting people to dinner who spoke about politics, current events, and literature. This person was able to travel abroad for a year during college because his parents could afford it. They also hired a language and calculus tutor for him. These same parents also belong to a private dining club, so the candidate learned early on how to dine in fine restaurants—the sort that are set with multiple forks, spoons, and knives. One of the parents went to the same college as the candidate, and that parent had donated a large sum to the alumni campaign. (According to *The Economist*, legacy students are two to four times more likely to get into a school than their equally qualified competitor who is without a legacy.)

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The second candidate—who had the same grades in college and the same degrees—comes to the organization for an interview from a family that was headed by a single parent who worked two jobs. The candidate had to spend summers watching her siblings during the day. Study time had to be squeezed in at the school library during school hours, or not at all. She worked weekends and evenings to defray tuition. She had no year abroad, no stimulating dinner table conversation, *New York Times*, tutors, or lessons in salad forks; just plain hard work, gut-felt ambition, and a desire to better herself.

The company recruiter may well be unconsciously looking for someone more like the first candidate than the second one, because there is a subtle and unconscious question being asked, which is, "Who is more like me?" It's probably clear to you at this point who has the unconscious advantage here. The playing field between these two candidates is uneven in a subtle and unconscious way. The recruiter is not specifically biased, but he is more comfortable with someone to whom he can relate. And in the end—when the grades and the degrees on paper are the same—there is still an intuitive instinct that remains. That gut may well favor the first candidate if he looks like the recruiter. Like is comfortable with like.

Ironically, another possibility is that the recruiter may in fact hire the second person precisely because she is different, and the recruiter has been challenged to hire for difference. But if the organization is not actually ready

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for the difference, and has not gone beyond Noah's ark, it will be a fruitless hire. At a meeting with diversity experts, I was struck by the following anonymous quote, which I explore in Chapter 6: "We hire for difference and then we fire because they aren't the same."

Marital Status. Almost all of us have an unconscious reaction to the marital status of our colleagues. Maybe we judge someone because they are divorced, assume the 43-year-old unmarried male must have commitment issues, or wonder why the 20-something woman got married so young. She must be insecure or need a man, we assume. Barbara Mikulski, a United States senator from Maryland, has a humorous take on this. She says, "If you are a woman with a career, a high-powered position, and you are *single*, people think that you couldn't get a husband because you are working so hard. If you are a *married* woman with a high-powered career, people may evaluate you and think you must be neglecting your husband because of your career. If you are *divorced* with that career, it is pretty clear that your career was a priority and you drove your husband away. And finally, if you are a *widow* with that high-powered career; well, you must have killed him." We judge and assume, and end up missing out on the more important (and verifiable) merits of our employees or our colleagues.

Family. One of the biggest beasts on the corporate Noah's ark is the white elephant known as family status. Children or no children? In the workplace, the topic

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of kids makes people positively squeamish. There is the uncertainty about whether your employees have kids, or whether your new hire is thinking about starting a family. That is often the unspoken million-dollar question in the workplace. Maybe this has happened to you, or maybe you can just imagine being a manager and having a woman come to you with a few simple words that immediately become not so simple. "I'm pregnant," she says. After the obligatory "Oh, congratulations!" what truly goes through your mind as a manager? Probably a litany of questions, such as, When is she leaving? Who will take over her work while she is gone? When is she coming back? When—and if—she does come back, what will that be like? Will she need special hours and flexible work time? While none of these questions are unreasonable, all this woman did was tell you she's pregnant, and in a snap you've come up with an impossibly long list of questions, many of which border on judgments.

I once asked a man who had sat through one of my presentations what he would be thinking after hearing the pregnancy news. "What's your first thought?" I asked. He was honest and started with, "Is she married?" Then he wanted to know, "Will she have another?" Both rather natural things to wonder, but each question clearly reveals an already established mind-set. And that's assuming that both thoughts occurred entirely unconsciously, and without any sort of malice.

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An Aside: The Litmus Test

Periodically throughout this book, I will propose a litmus test for you to allow yourself to check your own unconscious and natural reactions. I ask you to think about this next example as a litmus test for measuring how we react to and think about people based on all of our underlying beliefs. This is a vehicle to help us see what we really believe—and how we unconsciously think.

Imagine again that you are a manager, and that this time a male employee (most likely a male) comes to tell you that—with a war raging in Iraq and troops being sent to Afghanistan—he has decided to join the U.S. Army National Guard or the British Territorial Army. What is your immediate reaction? Do you have a negative or positive feeling toward this person? The managerial challenges are similar to those surrounding the employee who announced she was pregnant. When is this person leaving? How long will he be gone? Who is going to do their work? Will he have to deploy again? What will this person be like when he returns from duty?

The mental litmus test allows you to check in on your own thinking. Ask yourself the following questions. Do I think the soldier is performing a higher duty or a noble

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action, and am I happy to figure out a way to accommodate him? Do I think the pregnant woman is really just a pain to manage, find that this is predictable, and think it would be easier if I didn't have women working for me? Maybe you see each situation similarly, or maybe you don't. Throughout this book, I will ask you to consider seriously whether you'd be okay if someone who looks like you did one thing but bothered if someone who is different from you did the exact same thing.

Language. In most globalized companies, English is typically the language of business. Yet even when people are all speaking English, unconscious thoughts can arise based on accents or expressions, especially if English is not a first language for everyone. A native English-speaking British colleague of mine once remarked to me about a Japanese colleague we both knew. "He is just getting smarter and smarter, as his English is getting better," said my colleague. I don't think he even realized what he was saying! Obviously, it was unconscious.

Although I cannot hear the difference between dialects spoken in England, British friends of mine say they can place a person by origin, class, and schooling as soon as they start to speak. I call this Verbal MapQuest. These friends say that after just a few words, they can narrow down the county, the public or private school from which the person graduated, and even their income level. It is amazing, but it can unconsciously affect how they think about the people around them. These judgments come

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fast and furiously, and the assumptions are made after only a few words.

We all do this to one degree or another. People with heavy southern accents aren't always taken as seriously in the United States; people pick out rural, urban, or regional accents all the time in any place on the planet as a way of subconsciously categorizing others and differentiating groups from one another. This is yet another piece of the puzzle that we call the Noah's ark of diversity. It is yet another reason why diversity is a stepping-stone but not the solution.

Positions, Titles, Seniority, Work Location within an Organization. There are dominant divisions, units, or jobs within an organization, and there are nondominant divisions, units, and positions. Whether we realize it or not, we *do* think differently about people in each category. Think about people who work in nondominant areas such as human resources, finance, technology, legal, and corporate services. This hierarchy is a subtle part of the ark. What do we really believe about them, and what assumptions are we truly making? Often what comes to mind is a person who is not as driven or willing to take risks, and someone who is important but not crucial to the organization. Dominant departments are easy to spot, as they are usually the revenue generators—groups that include the salespeople, the bankers, and the billing lawyers. They make the money. These dominant divisions and the people working in them tend to have more power, more

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prestige, and greater importance within an organization. Accordingly, we treat people differently and think about people differently depending on their title or position.

Hobbies. Differing hobbies can create an uneven playing field and create an organizational structure that is exclusionary, unfair, and can in turn create subtle advantages or disadvantages. Let's say that a manager loves golf, and that two of the people who work for him love golf. They chit chat about the sport and about their weekend games, and even go out to play golf together sometimes. Thanks to this, the two subordinates get a lot of access to the manager in a casual, unstructured way. These two people are also wisely working the system. They know that they have the manager's ear and may have the opportunity, in the middle of a golf game, to talk about what they are working on, how well it is going, or discuss their own career goals. Because the manager has a familiarity or friendship of sorts with these two, he will naturally be favorably inclined to the two employees who play golf with him and speak his language. Those employees who work for the manager but don't play golf or tennis or soccer won't get to that level of access. They won't have that comfortable chit chat, and won't have shared casual afternoons on the golf course or other shared off-hour hobbies with the manager.

Then, when the time comes for the manager to assign a project, share inside information, give out a promotion, or even a pay raise—he will be more inclined to turn to the

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people he knows best, who know him, and with whom he is most comfortable. There is a higher probability that he will be looking to give his golf buddies a raise, a promotion, or a new project before the others. And he isn't even being malicious or a bad manager. It is all quite natural and unconscious for the manager to entrust something new to the people on the team he has had an opportunity to get to know and trust. This is a classic way in which the meritocracy in a diverse organization can quickly erode.

Because of the prevalence of the golf culture in many companies, people often wonder if they need to learn to play the sport. No, you don't. Golf is simply another word for *access*. You do need to get access to the manager, which should be equal to the golfer's access. Managers who golf with some but not others need to be fully aware and fully conscious of how they can potentially create an unfair, unlevel playing field in Noah's ark. They need to be aware of the uneven access they are giving and the subtle advantage that is created. They have to find other ways to ensure the same access to the nongolfing employees, and the nongolfers need to find ways to obtain access to their manager.

Physical Appearance. We look at people, their hair, body type, weight, or dress, and quickly assess them fairly or unfairly based on these traits. Diversity consultant Kendall Wright uses an interesting exercise to prove this point. He asks people to write down what they think about when they think of a thin person, and then write

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down what they think about when they think of a fat person. If one is honest, he finds that we do have differing beliefs, assumptions, and unconscious reactions to body size. And, generally, we don't view heavier people favorably (although ironically, in some cultures, the opposite would be true).

In his book *Blink*, Malcolm Gladwell writes about the assumptions and perceptions around height. He indicates that in the United States, just 16 percent of men are 6 feet 2 inches or taller. When it comes to male Fortune 500 CEOs, there are 57 percent who are over 6 feet 2 inches; almost four times the number in the general population. I have read extensively on leadership and interviewed many world leaders. However, I have yet to see any research that correlates leadership capability and skeletal structure. Nevertheless, when we see tall men, we are likely to think: leader. We may change our minds if the tall man opens his mouth and speaks nonsense, but we've initially given him the benefit of the doubt. Shorter men are therefore at an automatic disadvantage. If you are shorter than average and walk into a room, few people will think leader unless proven otherwise. One has it until they lose it, while the other one doesn't have it until they prove it. One is a subtle advantage and one is a subtle disadvantage. One is easier, the other harder.

There are many other types of diversity in the ark, including habits or personality types such as those measured by the Myers-Briggs test or other personality test

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systems. You are focused and not easily distracted, but your employee is, from your perspective, easily distracted and difficult to pin down. They may see it as exploring options and staying open to new ideas. You are constantly frustrated and see no value in their way of approaching the world because it is not your way.

Perception in diversity can also be tricky because we will sometimes go looking for a trait that we *want* someone to have. We may purposefully search for something merely to confirm in our mind who that person is—or who we would like them to be. For example, if we see a tall man and think he is a leader, we invest in him leadership ability, assume that we can defer to him; and allow him to play that role—even if he hasn't earned it. That is likely to give the man confidence, which, ironically, is one of the predominant traits of leadership. It is a wonderful and virtuous cycle for the man who is given opportunities and chances that someone else might not have. It's not so easy for the shorter Hispanic male or the shorter female in whom we can't seem to bestow automatic confidence. Instead, these nondominant groups must expend an immense amount of time and effort proving themselves before we are willing to give them the label of leader.

I was intrigued to learn that when it comes to symphony orchestras, there is an old belief that women perform differently than men on musical instruments—not different and equal, mind you; rather, different and not quite as strong. If you believe someone plays less

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powerfully and you are watching him or her play, you might think to yourself, "I hear that sound less forcefully." Symphony orchestras around the world use blind auditions so that musicians are behind screens in order to prevent this belief from influencing a tryout. Some orchestras even found that they had to put carpeting on the audition hall floor, because a performer's shoes were a tell-tale sign of gender. In some auditions, if there is no carpeting, a female auditioner will take off her shoes and a man in shoes will walk beside her, so that the judges will assume they are listening to a male, therefore providing a subtle advantage to the performer. Blind auditions are not the perfect solution, but the number of women selected to play in orchestras has increased because of them.

Some literature has also found subtle beliefs about non-European musical performers. Chinese oboist Liang Wang experienced this first hand as a student at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. A German composer once offered to show Wang how to play Brahms since he suspected he wouldn't know how, thanks to his nationality. "You don't have to be German to play Brahms," Wang told the *New York Times*. "I was very hurt. People think that way? It never occurred to me." Wang also described how, as a minority, he knew that he would have to be even more of a perfectionist than his Caucasian colleagues, and he knew he would have to endure more doubts about his mistakes. If he struggled with a

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European composer, others might believe that perhaps it was because he was Asian. Or, as Wang sees it, perhaps it was simply because he was having an off day. Wang said he knew people saw his nationality and his Asian skin before they saw his raw talent and abilities. He's even been asked on more than one occasion, "Did you listen to classical music when you were growing up?" Of course, this master musician listened to classical music growing up—more than most Americans and Europeans. Today, Wang is the principal oboe player for the New York Philharmonic.

The academic field refers to this notion of "I know what I know because I know it" as confirmation bias. In the book *Mistakes Were Made (But Not by Me)*, authors Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson call this perspective "implicit theory"—because people develop a theory about someone, but are unaware that they have done so. "The trouble is that once people develop an implicit theory, the confirmation bias kicks in and they stop seeing evidence that doesn't fit it." They then ignore or play down certain actions by the other, and exaggerate or are hypersensitive to certain other behaviors for the purpose of confirming their own internal theories. This can be especially dangerous in Noah's ark where there are so many differences and so many opportunities ripe for creating your own theory about what someone else is really like. It is easy to see things that fit your preconceived notions, hypotheses, or theories while dismissing other evidence that does not conform to what you have already decided. It's a trap. But

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the organization will not garner the true benefit of *hiring for difference*, realize the cognitive diversity of many ideas, or have a fair workplace as long as we continue to believe that we know what we know.

We must become truly aware of who is in the ark and what our unconscious thoughts tell us and lead us to do. Then we must act to overcome those subtle advantages or disadvantages that the diversity can create. The toughest piece of this is that we must stop making unconscious assumptions. That's not impossible, but it is difficult, and it will take time, practice, and a core realization that diversity itself is only the *first* step on the journey.

OBJECTIONS TO DIVERSITY

Knowing that this is a daunting task, it's no wonder that many people bristle at the thought of embracing diversity and moving beyond our differences. Some cringe at the mere mention of being asked to consider these issues. Often the dominant group individuals have the hardest time with these discussions. This isn't uncommon; it is in fact understandable, considering that most organizations haven't adequately implemented methods to allow diversity to succeed. I think it is important to acknowledge the ways in which this diversity discussion can rub people the wrong way. I go so far as to call these diversity issues

myths, and can assure you that the fears about diversity's so-called evils are relatively unfounded.

- **Reverse discrimination.** Isn't it just unfair favoritism when the scale tips to the *other*? Some managers worry that they won't be able to hire the most qualified individuals, and would rather be asked to discriminate by selecting people based on their differences rather than what the hiring individual sees as the merits.
- **Defies the meritocracy of the organization**. If we are using a different yardstick to measure qualifications for the diverse candidates, aren't we just lowering the standards of our organization—all to accommodate the minorities?
- **Coddling the diverse individuals**. Those in the dominant group often fear that they will have to be politically correct, avoid giving critical feedback, and treat the diverse employees more gingerly. This includes a fear of walking on eggshells and having to accept compromised performance.
- **Lack of evidence**. Many are skeptical that diversity is a tool for success, because they haven't read business cases that outline empirical evidence to support these claims.
- **Rocking the boat**. Change is admittedly hard; adding new dynamics to a group may shift power and could even change the familiar inner circles. It is unnerving

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for many in those power groups to think that they would have to share the limelight, the boardroom, or the credit they are used to receiving.

- **It's all about the law**. Some see the need to embrace diversity as merely a mandate that is being forced upon them by the law or by the desire to present a positive image to the public. They see the laws governing discrimination as a mere obstacle and resent Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)-type regulations or perceived quotas.
- **Don't blame me**. Individuals in the nondominant, diverse groups worry that they will be seen as taking advantage of the system or having only gotten a promotion because of their race, religion, or difference and not on their merits. This leaves some of the diverse crowd wishing the whole subject would simply go away so that they won't have to wonder if their colleagues are resentful or skeptical of their success.

These objections to diversity are truly objections to the challenges buried in having a diverse workplace. If we agree that our workplaces *are* going to be diverse, then we need to change the structures, raise awareness, level the playing fields, and actually demonstrate to ourselves how much more successful, productive, and globally competitive we can be by embracing these differences rather than fighting them and the necessary changes. In truth,

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it is rare in this day and age for a company to have a meritocracy already in place. Most have the pieces of diversity in place—the animals on the ark—but haven't achieved a place where "like" and "not like" are treated the same. There is always someone who is taller, went to the right school, played the popular sport, and has a subtle advantage. There are others, because of their difference from the dominant group, who are subtly disadvantaged. We are not talking about blatant inequities or discrimination in most of today's professional world (although this still does occur). We are talking about unconscious beliefs, preferences, values, thoughts, and actions. Those are what erode the promise of diversity, and why we need to get beyond diversity. We must understand the diversity dynamic—the part that the unconscious plays—so that we can be aware and overcome the ones that erode fairness in an organization. Only then can we capitalize on differences and find ways to succeed because of diversity rather than in the face of it. In that way, we will build stronger, truer meritocracies capable of extraordinary results.

Now for the tools and awareness that will assist in getting us there.