



Tolerance or Inclusion

On 3rd October 2000, Justin Trudeau in his eulogy for his late Father, said: “Simple tolerance, mere tolerance, is not enough. We need genuine and deep respect for each and every human being notwithstanding their thoughts, their values, their beliefs, their origins”.

Often tolerance and inclusion are mentioned as though they were essentially the same thing. In this article we will show that the two are quite different in the level of our involvement in the treatment of others which each shows, and that we should go beyond tolerance toward greater appreciation and inclusion of others in our workplaces and our communities. In short, we need to get to a place where we can enjoy experiencing the differences between us.

Tolerance is defined by the Canadian Oxford Dictionary as “*a willingness or ability to accept or allow without protest or irritation*”, or “*the capacity to withstand or endure*” Inclusion, on the other hand is to “*Treat or regard as part of the whole*”. It has not always been a trademark of the human species!

Do you tolerate ice cream, or do you look forward to it? Do we ‘*let people be*’ or do we ‘*let people in*’? Mere tolerance can look very patronizing or pitying because it is rather condescending. It tends to be how we look at people we subconsciously believe are less than us in some way, usually where “we” are the dominant group. We tolerate things that are irksome, but that we must suffer though because we all have to live here. Tolerance implies that something is painful and has to be endured. “Putting up with” diversity implies building up resistance to it, and that hardly moves us toward valuing others.

People generally have an ability to develop strong bonds with those outside their own “group.”. They can have positive feelings toward members of the other group, feel comfortable and at ease with them, believe that there is a close connection with them, seek interactions with them, and even feel impressed and inspired by members of the other group.

As an aside, should one tolerate intolerance? This is the philosophical paradox of tolerance - holding different views even on tolerance is not the same as putting those intolerant views into actions which harm others, so to that extent one can tolerate intolerant views, but not intolerant actions.

The question is, how to help people feel included and valued for their unique gifts and contributions. We can start by accepting others as equal people regardless of the differences or any disagreement. We can see diversity as a valuable asset, and a resource, not a liability. We can encourage and embrace different ideas and perspectives, and see that diversity as essential, something to be required.

We can't ignore the fact that real differences exist in race, gender, sexual orientation or identity, abilities, culture or philosophy. Inclusion, however, means that we will create environments and attitudes that are welcoming, positive and non-discriminatory.

How we see Diversity, its effort and its results					
Action	Discrimination	Toleration	Acceptance	Celebration	Inclusion
Effort	Negative	None	Neutral	Positive	Welcoming
Result	Harm	Suspicion	No change	Good start	Understanding

Many diversity awareness programs fall short of their intended goals in that encouraging mere 'awareness' does not change how we treat others, and tends to leave us sitting in the "tolerate" category. Even 'celebrating' diversity tends to over-simplify the complexities and the work required, and, if not allied with Inclusion, tends to underestimate the real needs. Intolerance and a lack of empathy is learned, so education is one of the best ways of addressing it.

No-one needs our acceptance or our tolerance – we are who we are regardless of whether another person puts up with it or not. We do, however, need to be included, to be valued, to be respected, to be welcomed, and to be treated as an equal, and that is what inclusion looks like. Tolerance is reactive – inclusion is proactive.