

A ppreciating Diversity During the Holidays

by Kate Berardo and Simma Lieberman

Valuing diversity is about more than "Happy Holidays" greetings card and other PC gestures. It's about inclusiveness.

Guess who's not celebrating Christmas this year?
Millions of people in the US.

That's right. *Tens of millions* of Americans don't celebrate Christmas religiously, either as followers of non-Christian religions (Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Jews) or as individuals with no religious affiliation. Because many stores tap into the cash value of Christmas with their plethora of Santas, ornaments, and Christmas fanfare at your nearby mall, we can easily overlook the depth of the diversity present in America during this season. In reality, many different events, both spiritual, religious, and tradition based, are being celebrated in many different ways during these times.

It used to be that being inclusive meant sending out PC "Happy Holidays" greeting cards and changing Christmas office parties to "Holiday parties." Today, it's about more than just changing labels and titles. It's about using a time to be with friends and family to build understanding and awareness about others.

Three Ways to Build Your Awareness and Create an Inclusive Holiday Environment

1 **Learn about other celebrations.** Carve out some time from online shopping or a Holiday TV show to learn about another culture's celebrations during this time. Watch a TV special on other celebrations, do a Google search on a holiday, or check out books at your local bookstore while gift shopping. Share your learning with others, and use it as a chance to expand the conversation at parties and at the dinner table.

2 **Make no expectations.** Realize that people celebrate a variety of holidays during this time of year, and some people choose to celebrate none.

Be respectful of these differences by taking interest in other people's traditions and making them feel welcome. Don't be afraid to ask people what holidays they celebrate. Find out what they do during this time of the year that is special. Let it be an opportunity to learn about different cultures and religions and the traditions that accompany them.

3 **Mark your calendar and your address book.** If the calendar or PDA you use does not list holidays like Kwanzaa, Hanukah, Ramadan, and Diwali, find out the dates and record them as reminders. Many programs like Outlook allow users to add calendar dates for celebrations from different parts of the world automatically, making this task quick and effortless. Take a few minutes to mark your address book with the holidays that people celebrate. When writing holiday cards, recognize their holiday, and include a little handwritten note acknowledging their celebration. ✧

A Note for Employers

Here are a few extra things employers can do to make their workplaces more inclusive during the holidays:

- Make sure your Holiday party isn't a Christmas party in disguise. Decorations and food should be general, and non-specific to any religion.
- Consider having a New Year's Party instead of a Holiday party. This type of party can get everyone on board with the company's mission and vision for the New Year.
- Post holiday greetings on your webpage and intranet for many religious holidays.
- Be respectful of these special dates, and plan events and meetings around various holidays.
- Display a multi-cultural calendar to help all employees stay aware of important cultural events for the rest of the year.
- Be flexible with the needs of different employees.

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