

Leveraging The Contribution Of Your Hispanic Employees

How A Language Gap Impacts Performance, Productivity & Profitability

By Isaac Botbol - IB Communication Skills - 2001

If Hispanic employees make up 20% or more of your company's workforce, you may have a productivity-sapping communication problem. If your managers and supervisors aren't aware of the cultural differences between American and Hispanic employees, a culture-gap that can impact hiring and retention may well be growing. If you're not taking well planned, expertly guided steps to leverage the strengths of your company's diverse workforce, you're underutilizing a key asset, both for today's challenges and for the ones to come.

Over 12 million Hispanic residents and citizens in Texas, New Mexico, California, New York, and Florida have changed

the requirements for successful supervision. With a projected influx of 10 million Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican and Central American residents arriving every

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10 years, multi-lingual communication and cultural awareness will become core supervision competencies. Cultural awareness and valuing diversity can no longer be thought of as EEOC-driven HR requirements; they are a rapidly growing condition of profitability.

Ask any Production Manager or Supervisor and he/she will give examples of the strong work ethic that is part of Hispanic culture. S/he will also tell you that engaging and focusing that work ethic requires an appreciation of the differences between Hispanic and Anglo workers, beginning with a willingness to learn how to communicate with non-English speaking employees. In many workplaces, bilingual managers and supervisors have been specially recruited to serve as the communication link between Hispanic and Anglo cultures. Although bridging the communication and culture gap is a good start, removing the gap by bringing all workers together is the solution that will yield maximum returns. Just like their

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Anglo counterparts, Hispanic employees want to be active, engaged participants in the refinement and accomplishment of your company's goals and objectives. Because overwhelming evidence tells us that employees of best-in-class companies are part of the organization's growth and development, facilitating the desire for universal, active engagement is in every stakeholder's best interests.

Carefully tailored training and development programs can be an effective way to engage all employees in your company's goals and objectives. Unfortunately, language barriers can marginalize the impact of training for your non-English speaking Hispanic workers. The lack of effective training programs and qualified instructors often results in the creation of a "training gap" for Spanish speaking front line workers and supervisors. English-only training sessions in leadership, supervision,

communication and the like exclude Spanish-only Hispanic employees as these well-intentioned programs send the message that if you don't speak English, you're not going to advance very far.

Correcting a language-centered "training gap" requires more than translating programs into Spanish. Due to centuries-old cultural practices, the learning process can be a very uncomfortable experience for Hispanic employees. The word for this type of discomfort is "vergüenza", which means a

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combination of shyness, modesty, and embarrassment. Sent to English-only interactive learning environments, many Hispanic workers fear that they will be

laughed at if they openly make mistakes or express their sentiments in front of others. Their desire to learn is often overwhelmed by the fear of failing in front of their peers.

The first step in building a culturally sensitive workplace education program is taken when an experienced facilitator builds trust between all his diverse participants. Trust is the foundation upon which communication and learning can occur; without trust there will be very little learning. Too often, workplace education programs fail because instructors follow a rigid agenda without an understanding of or regard for the diverse needs of their participants. When this happens, non-English speaking employees come to a workplace education program full of insecurities, sit quietly and nervously, feel apprehensive and eventually leave with the conviction that American training holds little for them.

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The challenge for facilitators of diverse learner groups is to (a) diminish the suspicion and distrust Hispanic employees have for management, (b) set realistic, attainable learning expectations and (c) convince every learner that their individual contributions are not only accepted but expected. Done well, a targeted, culturally aware program of training sessions can gradually close the gap between cultures as it expands every worker's ability to cooperate and collaborate.

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Finding a qualified, experienced training professional to help your company maximize the value of a diverse human resource can be a serious chal-

lenge. IB Communication Skills has met this challenge for many companies like yours. Isaac Botbol, principal of IB Communication Skills, is a pioneer in the development and delivery of multi-cultural training programs that teach:

- ✓ Team Building
- ✓ Leadership
- ✓ Supervision
- ✓ Customer Service
- ✓ Communication/ Interpersonal Skills,
- ✓ Workplace Math and
- ✓ Computer Literacy

One of IB Communication Skills most recent innovations is a tailored course called Vocational English in which Isaac teaches Hispanic workers the English vocabulary of their specific workplace. This highly targeted course quickly enables non-English speaking employees to make themselves readily understood as they communicate

in a more confident, interactive way with their English speaking peers. In the same vein, Isaac recently completed Survival English for Hispanics, a text that teaches the English vocabulary for common workplace dialogue as well as daily living skills such as opening a bank account and responding to medical issues.

Isaac has over fifteen years experience working with the executives, managers, supervisors and front line employees of companies that include AT&T, Sandoz-Agro, Kaiser Permanente, Stoneleigh Hotel, Omni Mandalay Hotel, Bush, Boake, Allen Foods, Quaker Oats, Equipto, Lone Star Park, and State Fair Foods. His fluency in the languages and the cultures of North, Central and South America make Isaac an invaluable expert to those companies whose profits require a fully integrated, engaged workforce.

For more information about IB Communication Skills or to speak with Isaac, visit our web site at

www.IBCommunicationSkills.com or call us at 972-991-7803