

The importance of promoting equal opportunity and How cultural diversity for Asian and Pacific Americans working in the Federal Government could be improved.

By Rebecca Hunt

Everyone has a natural fear of the unknown: fear of the dark, fear of strangers in the supermarket, and fears of what's lurking below the surface. This fear can lead to closing out something, or even someone, who may brighten your life and open up so many different possibilities. That's why promoting equal opportunity and cultural diversity is so important: when we have a diversified environment, we freely share our knowledge, experiences and backgrounds to create better lives for everyone.

A common excuse against equal opportunity is that it makes it harder for "more qualified" people to get job—that giving a job to someone because of their race or creed is unfair to everyone else. However, in picking someone based on qualifications alone, you may just as easily pick up the wrong person! While someone may have a better education or social status, it may be another's diversified background that makes them the "right fit" or the companies "cultural fit"—that makes them exceptional and irreplaceable. Letting excuses overrule cultivating diversity will only lead to stagnation in ideas and breakthroughs.

I believe that promoting equal opportunity will lead to an increase in diversity. Having a wide range of people to talk with has personally helped me to grow. However, despite our efforts to diversify, there is still more we can do. We need to celebrate and improve our cultural diversity in the workplace and government, and one way to do this is to improve cultural diversity for Asian and Pacific Americans.

Improving cultural diversity for any race, religion or creed is a tricky question to answer. Common answers are "hire more of those people" or "promote them to a higher position", both of which are great ideas. There should be more diversity in the work force and in the Federal Government. But how do we—the average, everyday person who may be clueless as to how to develop cultural diversity—improve it? What are the small steps that we can do?

Lets's look at those small things that everyone can do to bring diversity into the workplace. I was recently watching "Bizarre Foods with Andrew Zimmern", where he made a really wonderful point. People like food, and are especially willing to try anything at least once. Children happen to be more receptive to new foods, but most adults are pretty adventurous (I'd like to think I am!) Zimmern went on to say that when we try foods from different cultures, it makes us open to learn more about that culture. So follow Zimmern's example: bring in food! And while you're at it, bring it in on your favorite, traditional holiday. When co-worker ask "Well, what's the occasion?" or "What's this?", you can reply "Well, this is so and so. It's a

traditional food made for” And voila! You’ve just made your first step in improving cultural diversity!

Another small step is to give back to the community. I always like to suggest volunteer work as a way to give back. There are so many people that can benefit from help from others. For example, tutoring children or adults in the area’s of math, science, language—or even the arts! Another would be to volunteer for improving a neighborhood—another great way to help a community. A personal favorite of mine is encouraging students to study science and math so they later become engineers (the world always needs more engineers!)

The last small step is to remember that improving cultural diversity is a two way street: people are more likely to learn about you when they have a personal connection. In the Federal Government, our associates often become our personal friends: they’re the ones who are always there to laugh when times are good, struggle through difficult situations, and offer helping hands when times are down. They’re also the most open to learning more about you and your culture (especially when you invite them over for dinner!) To a friend, you’re a trusted source for what and what not to eat, and the particular customs and traditions of you culture.

I’d like to say that improving cultural diversity and promoting equal opportunity is simple, and that making sweeping changes overnight will fix everything in the morning. But, change takes time: that’s why we must be willing to take the little steps to make improvements in our daily lives! So, here’s my last word of advice: start with the small steps, and the big changes will follow.