

# INVESTOR'S BUSINESS DAILY

## Article Title: "Respecting Employee Differences "

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For **Steven Jones**, diversity and teamwork go hand in hand.

"We've expanded the definition of diversity from ethnic and gender differences to include positional and generational differences," said **Jones**, head of **Jones & Associates Consulting** in La Mesa, Calif. "That means, for example, getting lower-level employees to work more effectively with higher-level employees."

Many executives equate diversity with race and ethnicity. **Jones**, who advises private and public sector clients, sets an even higher bar. He calls a diverse work environment a place where "every employee feels valued and respected" and everyone honors individual differences.

**Jones** challenges the assumption that the biggest breakthroughs and smartest strategies flow from the top down. In a truly diverse workplace, bright ideas emanate from any employee, regardless of job title or age.

"To tap the best thinking in your organization, you must bridge generational conflicts so that, say, generation X and baby boomers team up and listen to each other," **Jones** said.

**Jones** gives four examples of how to ensure diversity at work:

Involve employees in goal-setting. Rather than dictate what you want your employees to achieve, give them a chance to craft their own objectives. For instance, have file clerks or customer-service reps decide for themselves how they can upgrade their production.

Dismantle cliques. In project teams, pair up workers who normally don't interact much. Host events where employees at all levels mingle and get to know each other better. If you notice certain groups keeping to themselves, encourage them to seek out a wider range of co-workers.

Raise awareness. Invite guest speakers to discuss topics that broaden everyone's appreciation of the challenges certain employees face. "Hold a brown-bag lunch where the speaker gives ideas on how to manage being a single mom," **Jones** suggested. "Everyone who attends will come away with a greater understanding of single moms."

Increase cross-training. Arrange for each unit within your company to educate others about what the units do. Appoint support staff as spokespeople for departments. "Morale will be greater if people at all levels know what their colleagues are doing in other areas of the organization," said **Jones**. "This sets the stage for more teamwork and the free flow of ideas."