

MULTIFACET

Diversity Solutions Ltd.
www.multifacet.ca

Presents:

The Multifaith Education and Accommodation Guide for the Workplace: (sample sections)

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Easy to understand and implement solutions to practical issues surrounding faith accommodation at the workplace.

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“My faith is like my skin, I can’t leave it at home!”

By: Nadir Shirazi

Faith and religion used to be the big elephant in the room—everyone had one but no one wanted to talk about it. Perhaps it is a resurgence of faith brought on by an increase in immigration to the U.S. or Canada, or perhaps it is the change in generations where people are more open about their beliefs. Whatever the reasons behind it, people are more aware of it; thus corporations and organizations should become educated on the differences and potential accommodations that would be required from their employees.

...

In Jan 2008 The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) launched a documentary entitled “Where is God today?” that became one of the most talked about documentaries all year long. Hundreds of Canadians weighed in on their diverse points of view. What surprised many was that contrary to belief faith is of major importance to Canadian Workers and not just among non-Christian groups. In the United States the findings were equally surprising. According to Google Zeitgeist the number one “Who is” search, was the question “Who is God”. The faith ostrich has taken its head out from the sand and wants to be at the table.

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Educating Diversity

As the generational paradigm changes with the retirement of baby boomers and an influx of Generation Y workers, corporations will be facing a skilled labour shortage in epidemic proportions. For instance, the Generation Y workers value a more accommodating working environment. While money is still important, reflections of ‘what’s in it for me?’ resound within the corporation’s walls. Thus accommodations for faith-based requirements are becoming more common place.

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Can we truly have faith education and accommodation in the workplace?

Yes! Not only can this be done it is being done every single day at Universities and Colleges across North America. Don’t believe me venture into any local campus. Odds are you will find some or all of the following.

- A meditation space
- Cafeterias that have diverse dietary options (Vegetarian, Kosher, Halal)
- A number of faith based groups
- Interfaith/Multifaith Councils
- Policies on faith accommodation

University and Colleges are some of most secular places yet they have been able to find a place for faith, and the last I checked people were not fleeing from the hallowed halls of education in fear of faith! In fact it is because of my own experience as a student and Interfaith Facilitator at York University, in Toronto Canada do I realize the power of multifaith education and accommodation in building a better organization and institution. As a Muslim I was not only able to practice my own faith but I was able to learn about Aborigines, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews Sikhs, Humanists, and others to gain a better vantage point of the world. Imagine that.

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Legal responsibilities for faith and religion in the Canadian workplace.

By: Stephen Hammond

One of the major accommodation grounds within human rights is religion. Since we are a country with many traditions based on the majority-observed Christian religion, sometimes it's hard to see that non-Christians merely want the same kinds of accommodations that Christians have taken for granted for years.

While most Canadians still identify themselves as Christian – 43% Roman Catholic and 29% Protestant, for a total of 72% of the population according to the 2001 Census – Christianity has declined as an overall percentage, with the largest increase involving Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists. In one decade, the number of Muslims doubled to 579,600, or 2% of the population. Hindus and Sikhs increased by 89% each for a total of 297,200 and 278,400 respectively, while Buddhists increased by 84% for a total of 300,300. Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists each make up approximately 1% of the Canadian population.

...

While some employers think of these numbers as small, note that the numbers are growing, and more people are asserting the basic rights that our courts have awarded and our governments have legislated.

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When the Supreme Court of Canada states that an employer must make accommodations towards an employee short of "undue hardship," they want businesses to find a way to employ and offer services to people who don't fit the same mold as everyone else. If, in the process, we have to make some changes, so be it. Let's be clear: Human rights legislation puts limits on the way you can run your business. The court makes it clear that businesses must make accommodations to both employees and clients.

Here are just a few examples from the courts and human rights tribunals where a business was required to find a reasonable accommodation to the point of undue hardship. In many cases, undue hardship has been difficult to prove.

Three Jewish teachers – Joseph Kadoch, Louise Elbraz and Jacob Lahmi – working for the Quebec school board in Chambly, were allowed to take a day's leave of absence, without pay, to celebrate Yom Kippur. They wanted to be paid for the day and grieved under provisions of the collective agreement. At the Supreme Court of Canada, the Court held that the school board must pay for the day off because they had not shown that doing so would constitute an unreasonable financial burden.

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“Legal responsibilities for faith and religion in the United States workplace.”

By: Deborah Volberg Pagnota

The United States is experiencing – for many reasons -- a religious resurgence. Exercising religious beliefs at the workplace may include praying or proselytize; refraining from work on religious holy days; consuming food according to religious precepts; avoiding physical contact with others, typically of the opposite sex; wearing particular clothing, body decoration or facial hair; using of religious symbols in correspondence or other display. The list is literally endless as employees and employers of increasingly diverse religions become more openly religious at work. These practices generate a host of legal questions at work, both for employers and employees.

In the U.S., the workplace is governed by a number of federal, state and local laws which delineate both (a) an employee’s religious rights at the workplace and (b) an employer’s obligation to accommodate those rights while at the same time ensuring other employees are not improperly affected by the exercise of religion at work.

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Employers may not discriminate. Let’s say that after the September 11, 2001, attacks in the U.S., an employer rejects several job applicants, telling them that it is because they are Muslim. This is clearly forbidden. Employers generally may not base job actions, conditions or benefits upon on an employee’s religion (whatever it may be, including a lack of religion) unless it is intrinsically related to the job requirements. A church, for example, properly may choose to hire a minister of that denomination; however, in hiring a janitor to clean the church’s properties, the church may not base their employment choice upon the applicants’ religion – the job itself does not require a person of that religion.

Nor, despite personal feelings, may employers favor one religion over another, allowing an employee of one religion to display a religious book or icon, but prohibiting an employee of another religion from a similar act. An employer may choose not to allow any religious displays at the workplace, but if the employer permits one employee to do so, others of different faiths must also be allowed to do so.

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EDUCATION SECTION

“Knowing gets you halfway there: Information on faith groups from A-Z”

One of the biggest challenges to diversity is that without knowledge about an individual or a group an organization and its workers are unaware of several issues, or merely become reactive. The following section of the guide goes over many different faith groups and their beliefs. A little knowledge goes a long way!

Note: Complete sections for all faith groups are available in the full guide and include: Founder/Origins, Main Belief Tenants, Scriptures, Structure, Symbols, Denominations/Divisions, Prayer/Worship/Meditation Modes, Dress/Appearances, Holy Days/Observances/Significant Days, Dietary Restrictions and other important facts.

- Aboriginal and Native
- Buddhism
- Christianity (sample available)
- Hinduism (sample available)
- Humanism
- Islam (sample available)
- Jainism
- Judaism (sample available)
- Shinto
- Sikhism
- Spiritualism
- Taoism
- Zoroastrianism

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CHRISTIANITY

Founder/Origins:

Founder is not an accurate term to describe the origins of Christianity. Christians recognize Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, and Son of God, accepting him as their savior and Lord.

Main Belief Tenets:

Beliefs and practices are derived from the Bible, which Christians believe to be God's inspired revelation. Most Christians believe that God is one, yet there are three co-equal persons Father, Son and Holy Spirit within the one Godhead – this is the doctrine of the Trinity. Most Christians believe that God became flesh in Jesus of Nazareth – the doctrine of the Incarnation.



HINDUISM

Founder/Origins:

Hinduism does not have a founder. One of the oldest religions, Hinduism evolved through millennia.

Main Belief Tenets:

A wide variety of beliefs held together by an attitude of mutual tolerance. All approaches to God are valid. Humankind's goal is to break free of this imperfect world and reunite with God. The soul reincarnates and transmigrates until reunion with God.

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Founder/Origins:

Founder is not an accurate term to define Islam. Muslims believe that Prophet Muhammad was the last of the Prophets from a line that included Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus who all testified to the oneness of (Allah) God. Muhammad lived around 540 Christian Era AD and through him the revelation of Allah came to preserve the final message for mankind.

Main Belief Tenets:

The principle belief of Islam is that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is his Prophet and Messenger to all human being. In addition there are five pillars of Islam that include the declaration of faith, prayers, fasting, charity, and Hajj (pilgrimage). Seven articles of faith are integral as well they are; Belief in Oneness of Allah, Belief in Angels of Allah, Belief in Revelations of Allah (books), Belief in Prophets of Allah(i.e. Adam, Moses, Ishmael, Isaac, Jesus), Belief in day of Judgment, Belief in Predestination, Belief in physical Resurrection after Death.



Founder/Origins: To say Judaism was founded is not a correct way to describe the origins of the Jewish faith. Jews believe that God chose Abraham to introduce the concept of Monotheism into a polytheistic world filled with pagan beliefs. God created a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their families, on an individual basis. These teachings would be later formed and identified with Jewish theology. This individual covenant was bestowed upon the Jewish people collectively when they received the Torah at Mount Sinai. According to Jewish tradition this occurred when Moses led the Jews to freedom from slavery in Egypt.

Main Belief Tenets:

Existence of one, indivisible, God by whose will the universe and all that it contains was created and continues to be maintained.

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ACCOMMODATION SECTION

“Who, what, where, when, why & how? Answers to the questions we know are out there.”

- Easy to understand and implement solutions to practical issues surrounding faith accommodation at the workplace.

One of the challenges that remain for an organization is to figure out how a persons beliefs need to be accommodated for in the workplace and what those accommodations practically mean and look like. Our accommodation section asks the questions that are on the minds of workers, human resource professionals, and all stakeholders in any organization.

Here is just a small sample.

Religious Holidays? My employees already get Statutory Holidays.

Many, if not all faith groups, have some religiously mandated holidays. Since most statutory holidays are reflective of the Christian tradition, such as Christmas and Easter, these may not be significant holidays for an employee who is of another faith group. To accommodate your diverse workplace, it is important to identify significant religious holidays and develop a formal religious holiday schedule for your employees. One way to accomplish this is to establish a “floating holiday” that enables employees to determine when they need to observe certain holidays according to their beliefs.

Why does that employee wear a ...?

Depending on the faith group an employee belongs to, you may see s/he wearing a particular garment that expresses their religious beliefs. In certain faith groups, specific type of dress/or clothing is required. The reasons may differ across faith groups, but generally these are worn for: Identification; Modesty; or Expression of faith.

Beards - The growth of beards may be mandated by certain faiths such as Judaism, Sikhism, and Islam. While the reasons, length, and styles may differ, it is important to recognize this as part of an employee’s religious dress.

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Skullcaps, turbans, head covering (for women). Various faiths observe some form of headgear as being a sign of humility. Many women may wear a head cover that covers her hair, neck, and chest as a sign of modesty.

Loose flowing clothing - Many faith groups observe a non-materialistic philosophy to the world. Some employees may frequently wear loose fitted clothing and may make a conscious effort to ensure that certain parts of their body always remain covered. These requirements are often prescribed to ensure that the human body is not subjected to sexual harassment, prejudice, or insult. This is supposed to encourage others to focus on the person's character, intellect, and other non-physical characteristics.

A Meditation space. Why?

For many faith groups, prayer and meditation or other forms of worship play a central role in daily life. If there is no suitable accommodation for employees to perform their prayers, then it can often lead to the following problems:

Employees who want to perform their prayers may find an unsuitable place to pray, such as a stair well or empty office. This space may pose a hazard to your employee.

Lack of communication between the employer and manager about prayer/meditation may create distrust and suspicion of where the employee is during certain times of the day.

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