



Embracing cultural diversity at work

# 1. Navigating Christmas

Each year Tim's team holds a Christmas celebration lunch. It is time to begin planning this year's, but Tim is worried. Over the past year, his team has grown to include people from many different cultures. Tim realises that celebrating Christmas might not resonate with everyone and that it could actually divide the group.

By involving the team in planning the event, Tim sees an opportunity for everyone to discuss how to thank everyone for their service during the year, what is important to them, consider how to cater for those of the Muslim, Jewish or other faiths in catering and more generally and to learn how to create something where every employee is consulted in advance.

# Embracing cultural diversity at work

## Possible actions

1. Establish purpose: It's important for leadership to set goals for the group. In this case, Tim's purpose is to successfully hold a celebratory event that could accommodate the entire team and their different religious affiliations. On a broader level, purpose could be ensuring that each team member communicates their cultural background and its importance to them if they are comfortable to do so.
2. Understand why: Recognising the purpose of diversity in your team and exploring the benefits people think it will bring to the group is a great next step. Ask: If we identify those things that unite us in the face of difference, what will it bring to our group? Allow your team to listen to their hearts as they work in pairs or groups to brainstorm ideas and present these to the team.
3. Open up: Create an environment where team members, if they wish, can feel comfortable to reveal details about themselves to others such as their religious affiliations, describing what it means to them and explaining their main religious celebrations. Other topics could include discussing where a team member or their parents were born. For those who don't identify with a particular culture, revealing research into their ancestry and how many generations they have traced can be a helpful conversation starter.
4. Take action: After the purpose is set, the team understands why these goals are so important and the group has a strong understanding of each individual's background, it's time to take action. In this case, plan a wonderful end-of-year event that allows everyone to not just take part, but to shine.

## Key messages

1. Teach team members to identify and communicate who they are, what's important to them and what they need from others.
2. Encourage deep listening and an appreciation of difference in others.
3. Structure time for goal setting, problem-solving, finding common ground and compromise.
4. Show how the introduction of new ideas and practices can bring renewal and excitement to a situation.
5. Never make someone feel obliged to disclose something that is private or personal if they do not wish to do so.