

## The Winters Group

**A**s companies continue their efforts to transform workplace cultures to insure that everyone is valued and included, there will undoubtedly be backlash. Most people don't like change and when the change appears to take them from their comfort zone, there are some predictable responses.

Based on our research from hundreds of focus groups, personal interviews, and surveys of all levels within an organization, we have observed six responses to change, which I have dubbed the Six "Fs"—the "Foggies," the "Fakers," the "Faultless," the "Fearful," the "Fighters," and the "Futurists." These responses are not limited to the introduction of diversity initiatives, but can manifest with any change that is perceived as potentially threatening.

**The "Foggies":** Foggies are workers in a stable environment that has not been impacted by workplace change. They have worked with the same team for years and it is a homogenous group. Foggies may see change around them but largely ignore it because it does not apply to them. A common response from a "foggie" might be: "Hey, we all get along great on my team. Always have. We think alike and get our work done. I don't see any issues."

This group has an extremely difficult time accepting diversity. They don't like change to begin with and they certainly are intolerant of change that requires working with someone who may be perceived as different.

Managers and diversity practitioners would be advised to examine the type of work environment people have been exposed to



### SIX UNIQUELY DIFFERENT RESPONSES TO CHANGE

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and tailor initiatives accordingly. People who have never experienced much diversity, whether it be racial, gender, age, thought, etc., have a more difficult time "getting it." Those who are in a fog about diversity need a very different type of introduction to help them experience difference. One-size-fits-all education just does not work; an initial assessment such as the Intercultural Development Inventory or the Discovering Diversity Profile can be very useful in steering individuals to the right level of education.

**The "Fakers":** This group tries to convince others and sometimes themselves that they embrace diversity concepts even though they really don't. They talk the talk but don't necessarily walk the talk. They say the right things but there is usually a disconnect when it comes to action. An example might be a manager who assembles a visibly diverse team but does not retain them because of his or her non-inclusive behaviors: for example, not soliciting input, being patronizing and/or not giving credit for ideas.

Sometimes people don't realize that their words are disingenuous. We become

programmed to say what we think is expected of us in the name of getting along or moving the process along. Until we have honest, authentic dialogue which challenges the inconsistencies between words and action, we will not make much progress towards inclusive workplaces. Small, natural work team learning communities have been instrumental in providing safe spaces to have these often painful discussions.

**The "Faultless":** This group sees diversity as an initiative to blame one group for another group's lack of progress. Some diversity practitioners, in providing an historical context, describe the oppression that certain groups in our society have faced. In describing the idea of "privilege," some react with a faultless posture. "I am not responsible for what my ancestors did," is a common response from this group. Or, "everybody has had problems, but with hard work you can overcome them."

White men, in particular, sometimes leave diversity education programs feeling like they are being blamed for today's workplace situation. What they come away hearing is: "The reason that women and people of color have not progressed as far

as they should have, and the reason we now need diversity initiatives, is because privileged white men have held us back.” While we all know that the issues are more complex and that it is not useful to simply lay blame, the faultless become turned off and literally become anti-diversity. We must continue to engage white males in the dialogue, to listen to their issues and work towards a no-fault environment.

**The “Fearful”:** Workers have a lot to fear today. The events of the past several years—downsizings, corporate scandals, mergers and acquisitions—have left many employees feeling vulnerable: “Will I have a job next week?” Coupled with an ongoing message of diversity (which still means affirmative action to many), this may lead to “If I don’t lose my job to a downsizing, I might lose it because I need to be replaced with a diversity hire.”

The fearful often engage in cautious, self-protectionist, non-team-oriented, even paranoid behavior as they try to avoid an undesired fate. Sometimes the fearful also take on a faultless stance. “It is not my fault that I have lost my job. It is because the company is replacing me with diversity hires.” People of color, women, and other members of minority groups sometimes fall prey to “fearful” behaviors, as well. They are fearful that if they do not assimilate, they may not succeed in the culture. They fear that if they bring too much of their “authentic selves” to the workplace, they will be misunderstood and not valued. They fear that they cannot adequately overcome the historical biases against certain groups.

Regardless of the genesis of the fear, fearful people cannot contribute to their fullest potential. They are preoccupied with thoughts and behaviors that take their

focus away from the job itself. The first step to managing fear is to acknowledge it and identify the source. Individuals first have to be honest with themselves about their anxiety; then open, safe, and honest team dialogue can alleviate misguided ideas.

**The “Fighters”:** There are two types of fighters: those who fight for the status quo and those who fight for change. The former are typically long-term employees who work hard to protect tradition; the latter often act as vanguards and are sometimes viewed as troublemakers in traditional organizations. The status quo fighters can be heard saying things like: “We have to be careful that we don’t move too fast on this diversity thing. We want to make sure we hire the right people.” Sometimes they are not as obvious and use a “faker” approach to lead others to believe they are in agreement but after the official meetings, they work behind the scenes to thwart diversity plans. They may feel threatened by the thought of new company practices or diversity initiatives.

It is not unusual for companies to hire experienced people from outside the culture for the purpose of accelerating change. It is also not unusual for these change agents to find themselves up against a very resistant culture. The more they “fight” for change, the more the status quo group resists. There are numerous examples of such fighters opting out or being pushed out of the system after very short tenures.

It is important for leadership to understand the culture, the risks associated with introducing “new, often controversial,

blood” into the system, and to be there to support and coach.

**The “Futurists”:** Futurists are workers who are adaptable, flexible, global in their thinking, experimenters, career-resilient, have a high self-concept and believe themselves to be in control of their destinies. Futurists are



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not fearful or threatened because they believe in themselves and have a “plan B,” and maybe even a “plan C,” when the current situation does not work out. They understand the value of a diverse workforce. They do not blame others for their situation. They are open to new and diverse ideas. Futurists respect others and are eager to learn more about other cultures. They can easily adapt in new situations.

Helping individuals identify their response to change and providing tools for them to move towards a more futurist mindset is a monumental undertaking. Self-knowledge, however, is the lever for personal growth and transformation. After all, Inclusion starts with “I.”

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