

## **DIVERSITY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF MILITARY CULTURE**

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The American military is unquestionably an institution whose corporate culture places an exceedingly high value upon uniformity. When we dress the same, talk the same, paint our vehicles the same, train to the same high standards and so forth, that is generally considered by all of us to be a good thing.

As a result, it might seem somewhat hypocritical for an organization of the armed services like the National Guard to embrace the cause of diversity and see it too as a good thing. The two concepts are almost opposites. In truth, it is not hypocrisy – it is change.

To meet the new security challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, both the Army and the Air National Guard, along with their active component counterparts, are presently engaged in a broad process of transformation and modernization to better deal with new threats and leverage new technologies. Most frequently the terms “transformation” and “modernization” refer to organization and equipment. But there is also a need to transform and modernize our institutional culture as well. We need to update, not only our organization charts, vehicles and aircraft, we also need to re-look our values, behaviors and interactions with one another.

The National Guard’s “Year of Diversity” is, therefore, offered as an initiative to transform and modernize the culture of the National Guard. This initiative was planned prior to the events of 11 September 2001, but it remains valid. The war on terrorism will be a new sort of war. It will demand a broad-based yet cohesive team to prosecute it successfully.

For years now the Department of Defense has set the corporate standard and made tremendous strides in creating a more fair and equitable teamwork environment through equal opportunity and affirmative action programs. We have policies prohibiting extremist group activities and harassment based upon gender or sexual orientation. The positive results of these policies and programs are now obvious and widespread. The watchword for successful implementation of these programs was “compliance.” Comply with the EO and other rules and you were “good to go.”

Now, however, it is time for us to go to the next step and migrate the values of fair treatment from the regulations and rulebooks into our daily interactions with each other as a conscious effort.

The National Guard is a diverse organization. We are of different religions, races and ethnicities. Some are mixed races; some are not religious at all. We come from a variety of linguistic groups. We practice different politics. We hail from every region of the country and every corner of the globe. Our differences are myriad, but this is as it should be as each represents a segment of our society. The National Guard exists in and for an even more diverse nation. America is the most diverse nation on Earth. For us to be a representative and ultimately successful American institution we need to not only recognize this diversity, but embrace and celebrate it as a good thing. We cannot allow ourselves to become isolated from the values or composition of the communities we serve.

The broader American civilian society is clearly moving toward an ever more positive appreciation of differences among people. Intolerance and bigotry have become quite

unfashionable. Discrimination and harassment are no longer merely illegal, they have also become socially unacceptable. While we in the National Guard don't want to be far out of step with the society we serve, we don't embrace diversity merely for the sake of fashion or "political correctness." We embrace and celebrate diversity primarily because, by doing so, it strengthens teamwork, creates a more effective work environment and thereby helps us to accomplish the mission. In these times, our country needs its National Guard to be as strong as possible.

Throughout this Year of Diversity, I ask members of the National Guard to pause and consider their own thoughts, words and actions with regard to people who are somehow different from themselves. Question your own motivations. Before you make a negative assumption about someone's ability to do a job, stop and ask yourself if you are merely making that assumption based upon the person's race, ethnicity, gender or some other irrelevant factor. Before you start imposing your religious views on someone else or excluding them because of theirs, ask yourself how you would feel if you were in their place. Before you act on an impulse to taunt or harass someone for any reason, stop...just stop and think about it.

The Year of Diversity is not a 12-month EO seminar. It is a celebration. Once we check ourselves for negative thoughts and actions based on differences, then we can evolve to recognizing the actual benefits of those differences. The truth is that the National Guard is a stronger, better organization because of its diversity. Recognizing that fact and honoring it will make us even stronger and even better! That is what the Year of Diversity is all about.

With any such initiative advanced at the national level, however, there is something of a danger that it will not translate into action at the unit and individual level. All of our slogans, brochures, banners, and seminars around the Year of Diversity will mean nothing if they are not translated into real change and action. Generals can tout it; colonels can endorse it. But to be successful, the junior officers and the NCOs must take ownership in it, believe in it and make it happen at the flight, company and, yes, individual level. Indeed, every one of us from the most junior enlisted member to the Chief of the National Guard Bureau must make a commitment to internalize it, make it a part of ourselves, and ultimately to live it in practice. That is my challenge and my request to you. Make this work!