

is address people's fear of the unknown," says Mauricio Velásquez, president of the Diversity Training Group (DTG), a Virginia-based company that conducts diversity and gender equity training for clients like Hewlett Packard, Lucent Technologies, and Fila. To try to understand this "diversity training adversity," we've decided to learn more: about the objectives of diversity training sessions, the expectations and experiences of participants, and—when all is said and done—the results.

Velásquez says that the objectives of DTG's sessions are to help people understand exactly what inclusivity in the workplace means—taking all perspectives and backgrounds into



## **THE BLACK-AND-WHITE PENGUINS WHO DOMINATED SENIOR MANAGEMENT TOLD A MULTICOLORED PEACOCK THAT SHE'D BE PROMOTED TO A BOARD POSITION IF SHE TONED DOWN HER COLORS.**

account when making a decision or putting a business practice into place. Trainers explain the benefit of diversity for individuals and the company, and the numerous ways that employees can take an active role in creating an inclusive work environment.

To do all that, a typical training session usually includes some or all of the following elements: a questionnaire to be completed before the session (to elicit participants' initial ideas about difference and diversity), discussion, role-playing, lectures, and films. Though our interviewees' diversity training almost invariably focused on black-and-white racial equity, sessions can be much more inclusive. Vanessa Waite\*, a 28-year-old senior analyst, says her investment bank's diversity training emphasized that "diversity is not just about race and gender. It includes gay people, older people, flexibility in the workplace, etc."

Often, a session begins with participants listing stereotypes or characteristics about themselves both as individuals and as members of their respective diversity groups, followed by discussion. Naima Jones\*, a 25-year-old former employee at a sports company, attended a training session where sexual orientation became the hot button. "It got tense when someone raised the issue of a gay person not feeling comfortable hanging up a picture of their partner, whereas married people do it with no problem." For Charles Richmond\*,

a 29-year-old biracial social worker, this exercise was explosive and illustrated that diversity issues are more than skin deep. "Someone mentioned a stereotype about blacks being lazy and shiftless. A Caribbean-American said, 'That's only true of the American blacks. We [Caribbean blacks] generally have two or three jobs.' Then, everybody was up in arms. We didn't even get to finish the exercise."

The success of these discussions, of course, depends on the candor of participants, a factor that some say is inhibited by management participation. "Because senior management was also in the session, it was hard for peo-

ple to really say what was on their minds," remembers Nunes. Jones agrees, noting that her company's third highest-ranking executive was also at the training. "I couldn't talk freely with him sitting right there."

One way to overcome this lack of candor is with films. Used effectively, films can give the participants universal, nonthreatening language to use in their communication—a way to talk more easily about complicated issues. For example, Marina Ray\*, 26, an assistant vice president of Internet marketing, attended a session where an animated film known as "The Penguin and the Peacock" was shown. In the film, the black-and-white penguins who dominated senior management told a multicolored peacock that she'd be promoted to the board if she toned down her colors. Coveting the promotion, the peacock donned a penguin suit and won the board seat. When her vibrant, recalcitrant colors peeked through the costume, however, the penguins dismissed her. "After the training, the senior VP said that our current board was all white men and that the company was going to name a new board member shortly," says Ray. "Someone asked, 'Is that person going to be a peacock?' No one would have ever asked that type of question before."

Films can also be an effective means of presenting potentially inflammatory issues, in part because a film can seem more objective than a speaker. Angela Vallot, director of corporate diversity initiatives at Texaco (which has worked to make diversity strides since it settled a \$176 million racial discrimination suit in 1996), says that Texaco shows one clip where a car salesman