

# The Islam Project



*How does your company show its commitment to religious diversity?*

*Do you have policies and specific programs?*

*Are managers trained to create inclusive work environments and accommodate religious practices?*

*There are lots of **misperceptions and stereotypes** of what Islam is all about. Active Voice in the Workplace: The Islam Project provides an **invaluable grasp** on this aspect of diversity to work effectively with Muslim employees, contractors, and business partners around the world.*

*Janet Winters-Smith  
Senior Global Diversity Advisor, ChevronTexaco*

## WHAT IS ACTIVE VOICE IN THE WORKPLACE: THE ISLAM PROJECT?

*The Islam Project* is an innovative and timely multimedia toolkit that uses personal stories told in two acclaimed documentary films on Islam and Muslims worldwide as springboards for strategic corporate diversity training.

*Active Voice in the Workplace: The Islam Project* provides an overview of Islam, identifying barriers and clarifying misconceptions that affect the 5 to 7 million Muslims in America today. The program addresses key workplace issues including communication, rapport, problem solving and productivity. It deals with attire, social interaction, food and fasting, prayers and holidays.

The workplace toolkit consists of a highly adaptable integrated multimedia presentation which includes short personal video stories from the acclaimed PBS films *Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet* and *Muslims*. The accompanying facilitation guide is strategically designed to support long-term outcomes.

## WHY NOW?

In workplaces nationwide, unaware managers are allowing inadvertent law breaking -- for instance in not offering religious accommodation for praying or letting societal ignorance and stereotyping about Muslims to play out in the workplace. Muslims are fearful, feel excluded, or are subjected to insulting comments and slurs about 9/11, Al Qaeda, and the war in Iraq. Across the country, these issues are causing teamwork and turnover problems and may be creating a hostile work environment.

Islam is one of the least understood religions. For businesses, this fact is significant since the Muslim community defines itself by its religion (such as Orthodox Jews or Sikhs -- but in contrast to communities that identify themselves by sexual orientation or ethnicity, for instance.) This is important because of the business implications of Islamic customs and rituals such as prayer, participation in social events, food customs, or shaking hands at meetings.

## WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES IN BRINGING THE ISLAM PROJECT TO THE WORKPLACE?

The *Active Voice in the Workplace: The Islam Project* workplace toolkit is a practical employee training program that:

- Helps employees and managers push past stereotypes and establish a more productive working environment for people of all faiths and cultural backgrounds.
- Enables management and staff to walk away with concrete strategies for preventing harassment, hostility and discrimination based on religious diversity.

## WHAT'S IN THE WORKPLACE TOOLKIT?

**Training:** *Active Voice in the Workplace: The Islam Project* is created with the training expertise of Connecting Cultures and Islamic Networks Group, cutting-edge providers of education on cultural diversity and Muslims in the workplace. Both providers are available for tailored delivery of the program. Included in the package is a laminated job aid for ready desk referral.

**Video Stories:** To provide maximum flexibility and strategic focus, short film stories on specific themes related to Muslims in the workplace are integrated into the program for viewing and discussion.

**Facilitation Guides:** This tool includes guidelines for leading a discussion on Islam, identifying Muslim trainers or local resources, FAQ's on Islam and Muslims, discussion questions about the films, ideas for action steps within the workplace, background information on Islam, and a list of additional resources, including a Muslim speaker's bureau.



**The Films:** *Muslims*, produced by the Independent Production Fund, provides an intimate look at the lives of Muslims in various countries around the world. *Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet*, produced by Kikim Media and Unity Productions Foundation, tells the story of the 7th century prophet who changed world history in 23 years, and continues to shape the lives of more than 1.5 billion people.

According to the needs of the organization, *Active Voice in the Workplace: The Islam Project* can be made available in the following media:

- Facilitated multimedia presentation
- Integrated powerpoint/multimedia toolkit for in-house delivery
- Video (on VHS, DVD or streamed)
- E-learning self-guided program, complete with interactive elements

*The **business case** provides the hook and the personal **video stories** makes the whole program come alive.*

**Rohini Anand, Senior VP and Chief Diversity Officer  
Sodexo, Inc.**

## THE BUSINESS CASE FOR THE ISLAM PROJECT

### Productivity Loss

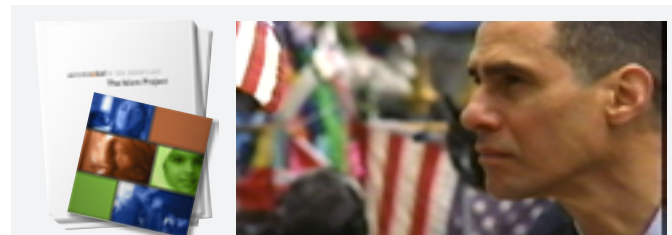
The international prominence of Islam and Muslims and shifting demographics have come with a heightened number of requests for training about Islam, as well as an increase in on the job complaints and claims. Again this year, training organizations such as Connecting Cultures and Islamic Networks Group saw a spike in the desire for Islam training on the anniversary of September 11. But, in some ways, it is unidentified needs for training that are most alarming. Though 23% of Muslims have reported discrimination, hostilities, and harassment to managers, the reality of the corporate experience is more serious: 77% of Muslims have religious bias concerns; 45% considered quitting; and 50% said productivity has been affected. (According to a Tanenbaum Center survey, 2001.)

### Fitting in

Now more than ever, for non Muslim employees in companies with global reach or culturally and religiously diverse personnel, partners, and customers, a pervasive lack of understanding about Islam and Muslims can be a serious barrier to effective working relationships and team productivity. According to a 2003 national representative study of American employees by the Level Playing Field Institute, Muslim and gay employees are considered to be the least socially acceptable people in the workplace. When employees were asked who they felt 'fit in' in the workplace, two groups were perceived as 'fitting in' significantly less than other groups – Muslims and homosexuals.

### Discrimination and Litigation

After 9/11, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) implemented a new data code (Process Code Z) in its National Charge Data base to closely monitor 9/11-related backlash employment discrimination charge filings by individuals who are – or who are perceived to be – Arab, Muslim, Middle-Eastern, South Asian or Sikh. In 2002 alone, complaints of workplace bias against Muslims more than doubled. The Commission has processed and resolved more than 900 Process Code Z charges of discrimination post 9/11, litigated 15 cases, and obtained a total of approximately \$3.2 million dollars for aggrieved individuals.



For more information on *Active Voice in the Workplace: The Islam Project* please contact Steve Bartz, Projects Director at Active Voice at [steve@activevoice.net](mailto:steve@activevoice.net) or 415.553.2841.

For in-house training with *The Islam Project* contact Luby Ismail of Connecting Cultures (East Coast) at [lismail@connecting-cultures.net](mailto:lismail@connecting-cultures.net) or 301.438.3153 or Maha El Genaidi of ING (Nationwide) at [elgenaidi@ing.org](mailto:elgenaidi@ing.org) or 408.296.7312.