

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/in-brief/experience-what-it-means-to-be-the-other/>

There's a strong business case for diversity and inclusion. But Airbnb strategic advisor and Modern Elder Academy founder Chip Conley adds another layer: Actually experiencing what it's like to be "the other" will make you a more empathetic and effective leader.



Transcript

- First of all, we know about diversity and inclusion and belonging.. The idea of diversity and inclusion, lots of evidence that it actually works in the workplace.. Diverse workplaces, when it comes to gender, are 15% more successful, according to McKenzie.. Diverse workplaces, when it comes to race, are 35% more effective in terms of what comes out of them.. When it comes to age, tons of evidence that age-diverse teams do better partly because young people are exceptionally good at focus.. Older people, we know what we lose brain-wise as we get older, right? What do we lose? Did you already forget? You lose memory (laughs).. That was a joke.. You get older and your memory's not as good, and you're maybe not as quick as you used to be.. But the thing that a lot of people don't know about the aging brain or the mature brain is you actually get more adept at doing the left brain, right brain tango.. You actually do all-wheel drive of your brain..

You actually are more able to synthesize left and right brain.. Why is that valuable? It means you can actually see, you can sort of connect the dots and synthetically see holistic things that someone else might not be able to see.. You have that kind of person on a team while you also have a young person who's like brilliant about some specific things, that can be a great team.. So I think diversity is really essential.. But I don't say this necessarily purely for effectiveness.. I don't say it necessarily purely for political correct reasons.. But I say it, frankly, for your own benefit.. If part of what I'm talking about today is the lessons I've learned, a lesson I've learned is when I was the other I learned what it meant to be more empathetic.. And when I was an empathetic leader I understood what a person was feeling in the room.. So I was the other in high school..

I went to a place called Long Beach Poly High School.. Snoop Dog's high school, you know who Snoop Dog is? Look at the guy in the back, he's going, yes, yes.. Are you from Long Beach Poly? - [Man] No, my buddy is.. - Okay, so you know what it is.. It's an inner city high school.. They called me Curious White Boy (laughter) because I was curious about other cultures.. But I learned, luckily, in my high school years as a white guy what it meant to be the other.. Then at age 22 I came out as a gay man in a fraternity having played water polo at Stanford.. That was also being the other.. And at Airbnb, absolutely no doubt, as a 52 year old amongst 26 year olds I was the other..

But that ability to be the other truly tenderized my heart and my ability to understand other people better than anything else I've ever had in my life.. So when you can, especially for those of you in the room who are white, male, and straight, figure out an opportunity to be the other, whether that means living in a foreign country for a period of time or joining a group that's very different than you demographically.. It will actually make you a better human over time beyond just being a better leader..