

# The Taco Ballerina: Digging Deeper to Recognize and Appreciate Diversity

Anna E. Eberlin

I was taking my daughter to a basketball game recently, a mommy-daughter date she was very excited about. She always wants details. “Mom, what time is the game?” “It is at 7:00.” “Okay, where is the game?” “Honey, it is at the Taco Bell Arena. We are going to the Taco Bell Arena to watch the game at 7:00.” Boy, was she excited! I was delighted that she was so happy to be going to the game.

It wasn't until we saw the basketball court as we walked through the tunnel to our seats that her face fell. “What's wrong?” I asked. I quickly found out that she believed she was going to see the Taco Ballerina! — not a basketball game. I had to explain to my precocious four-year-old that “no, we aren't here to see a ballerina (with or without tacos); we are at the Taco\_Bell\_Arena to watch the Boise State basketball game.”

Kids take things at face value: what you *hear* is what you get. My daughter was confident that what she had heard and understood was absolutely true. Just acceptance and trust. But she had only scratched the surface. (What can you expect? She's four.)

As kids get older, though, they begin to see things against a backdrop of experiences, both good and bad, and realize that everything is not always as it seems. Instead, there are nuances, blurry lines, questions about what is what. My daughter could only see the world through the lenses that she had been given so far. She had no context or experience or examples to figure out the Taco Ballerina was different from the Taco Bell Arena. She heard “Taco Ballerina” and thus there must be a taco ballerina.

But to truly understand another, you need to have the critical ques-

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tioning skills, the critical thinking skills, and do the digging. We can all use these skills to help discover, appreciate, and foster diversity in our communities.

## Recognizing and appreciating diversity

Diversity is leading your workplace to establish and encourage an inclusive workplace culture. Take a look around your office in Boise. In Pocatello. In Grangeville. In Sandpoint. Is it diverse? On first look, many (not all) Idaho attorneys would probably say no. And it may make many Idaho attorneys anxious to even think about diversity — or the lack thereof, perceived or not — in their offices and in their communities.

But diversity is more than race, ethnicity or gender; it also includes age, religion, social class, disability, experience, sexual preference, gender expression, political beliefs, or other ideologies. You sometimes have to dig a little deeper to appreciate and understand the unique backgrounds and perspectives of members of your community, whether that community is your office, your neighborhood, or your city.

Each individual has a unique history, a story that provides insights when we interact and when we plan professionally or socially. Appreciating the different stories will promote

inclusiveness and creativity, and ultimately, will lead to more success. A diverse makeup of teams generally leads to improved collaboration and performance because the team can utilize each member's individual strengths and backgrounds.

## Leading through example

At work, creating a diverse and inclusive community should not be delegated to HR or the attorney next door. Personal commitment combined with action will encourage and support the rich diversity that already exists, and your example may inspire others to leap into action as well. Of course, there are certain categories of diversity that may be lacking in Idaho as a whole, but supporting the people around us in an environment where inclusion is embedded in the daily experience is vital.

Make an effort to get to know others in your office or community, and you may just find that your colleague down the hall has an engineering background and can provide some insight on that expert witness question, or that another colleague spent two summers in Argentina during college and can help with that translation project.

Share with your family, your friends and others in your life the differences about those in your office and community and what makes

people unique. Sharing what is important as a part of your life will instill diversity as a value over time. Set a good example by including others and getting to know others, whether you think you are exactly alike or already know that you are completely different.

Wherever you are, model inclusive behavior and words. Whose office do you stop by to say hi to? Who do you say hi to in the elevator? Who do you mentor? Who mentors you? And on the other end, who do you say hi to in your neighborhood? Who do you invite over for an afternoon barbecue? Modeling is contagious, hopefully to both your coworkers and to your kids.

### Digging a little deeper

Seeking to recognize and appreciate the diversity at work and at home is about inclusion. Being friendly is a start, but really getting to know

people to create a mutual respect is paramount. Diversity and inclusion are about making your office a better place to work, both from the perspective of culture and morale but also from the perspective that having a more diverse workplace contributes to creativity in thought, and ultimately, a more effective and successful end result.

Even interacting with individuals with varying backgrounds will force group members to prepare better, to anticipate alternative perspectives, and to expect that reaching consensus will take more effort but will result in more success. And fostering diversity is about translating these principles in the workplace to our homes and wider communities. Dealing with diversity is difficult, because at first, you don't see it and don't understand it or the views of others. But creating diversity starts as simply as hearing the "Taco Balle-

rina" — what you want to hear versus understanding what is there.

Dig a little deeper at work and at home and you will reap the benefits — and always remember the Taco Ballerina: things are not always what they seem on the surface.

### About the Author

**Anna E. Eberlin** is a real estate transactional and litigation attorney with Holland & Hart, LLP. Her practice also includes representation of lenders and borrowers in secured and unsecured financing transactions, loan workouts, and loan opinions; general corporate representation; and water law and environmental issues. Ms. Eberlin is also a mom to three kids, a pianist, and a volleyball player.



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