



# **RiseZine**

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Welcome to **RiseZine** my quarterly electronic magazine (ezine) that can help you solve problems in your business and your life. It is my desire to bring you inspiration from the experiences I gained during the twenty (20) years I spent as a Judge of the Denver County Court participating in the transformation of lives. I'm convinced that those experiences will heighten your knowledge, sensitivity and outlook on the issues you face in your business and your life. I am honored to share your precious time with you.

### **Are you Culturally Competent?**

The South African flag is the only national flag in the world to display six colors as a part of its primary design. After a month long cornucopia of colors, sights and sounds (can you say “vuvuzelas”), South Africa adjusts to life after the 2010 World Cup. Since receiving the award in 2004, South Africa was viewed in a different light.

With its history of Apartheid (official policy of segregation of the races), a huge psychological barrier had to be crossed. After internal protests, insurgency and western nations



and institutional boycotts led to a peaceful transition to majority rule, the first multi-racial elections in 1994 brought the end to apartheid and Nelson Mandela became President. The “rainbow nation” has regained some of its luster with the World Cup and a renewed sense of common purpose between the country’s black majority and the white minority. Would the enthusiasm and unity fostered by the World Cup experience carry over into the daily lives of its 48 million people? That remains to be seen. What we can garner from watching the diverse cultures interact in the stadiums all over the country is that cultural competence can be a unifying force for communication and peace no matter the language.

A few months ago, I was retained to assist a higher education organization in enhancing relationships between staff members of diverse backgrounds, gender, levels of physical ability, sexual orientation and age. The University understood that in order to attract a diverse population in the highly competitive arena of college recruitment, and to provide a rich educational experience for students matriculating there, it had to promote open access and opportunity for all.

So, why is diversity important? The University of Oregon defines diversity as, “[A] concept that encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique and recognizing our individual differences; understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.” I expand the definition to include diversity as acceptance, respect, and understanding of individual differences along the dimensions of race, age, gender, sexual orientation, physical abilities, religious beliefs, socio-economic status and political beliefs toward the goal of embracing and celebrating the differences as evidence of being a culturally competent person.

Cultural competence means “a set of skills and attitudes that allow individuals to effectively and appropriately communicate and work with people who are different from themselves.” Promoting diversity but failing to include everyone in the organization will limit an organizations ability to reap the full benefits of a diverse workforce. Although it may enhance organizational performance, high employee diversity may pose potential problems. In a purely homogenous organization, it is easier to maintain a sense of cohesiveness because people tend to feel more comfortable when they interact primarily with similar individuals. Thus, diversity

can be a double-edged sword, requiring decision-making creativity and the congruence of the organization with the marketplace but decreasing employee's satisfaction with being members of the organization. An organization's diversity culture influences the extent to which these problems appear. In order to move your organization forward to function as a multicultural institution consider the following three types of diversity cultures:

1. **MONOLITHIC organizations** are characterized by a large majority of employees from one group; differences between group members are resolved by the process of assimilation. The message is: 'we do not particularly welcome diversity'.
2. **PLURALISTIC organizations** are more heterogeneous, they have taken steps to promote diversity. They focus on the numbers of majority versus minority members. The mixed message: We promote diversity, but we expect employees from minority groups to fit in with the majority group.
3. **MULTICULTURAL organizations** do more than promote diversity; they also promote a culture of inclusion. The goal is to create a culture in which all employees feel comfortable and appreciated and are given a chance to make meaningful contributions; the message: 'we welcome members of all groups as full participants and strive to take advantage of their skills and backgrounds'.

When I completed the higher education diversity presentation, I asked the participants to comment on what they had learned. They reported that they learned that they needed to "see each person individually and to try to understand who they really are"; "not be judgmental with certain persons and situations;" "how to approach others and listening actively;" and, "think more about how I am perceived by my peers." I can report that they are on the path to cultural competence.

There is another reason why I chose the South African World Cup backdrop for this RiseZine. It brought back memories of my first meeting with an exiled South African in the late 1960's in Denver, Colorado. When I was in graduate school, I had the opportunity to meet and know Dr. Ezekiel Mphahlele while he was at the University of Denver. He was banned from teaching in South Africa because of

his anti-apartheid writings and because he was a member of the African National Congress (ANC). He painted for me a vivid picture of the treachery of apartheid. That was the same time Nelson Mandela was a leader of the ANC and was spending 27 years in prison. That same year I met the Assistant Dean of the Graduate School at the University of Denver, John W. Rice. I remember his daughter back then; (she would go on to become the United States Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice). Dean Rice taught a class called the Black Experience in America. He left the segregated city of Birmingham, Alabama, where he opposed institutional racism, governmental oppression and the Viet Nam War. He recruited many more who suffered from oppression to the ivy-lined streets at the University of Denver. Those memories of some forty years ago are juxtaposed against what are the successes I see in the “rainbow nation” today.

When the games were over South African President Jacob Zuma finally proclaimed, “When we won the rights to host the World Cup, we knew that working together we would be able to succeed. But what has happened has exceeded our expectations. That is because of the role played by our people, the South Africans. They are the stars and champions of this tournament.”

On Sunday, I watched the final round of the British Open Golf Championship at St. Andrews, Scotland, the home of golf. The South African flag was flying again when South African golfer Louis Oosthuizen raised the Claret Jug as the winner. His first words upon accepting



the trophy were, “Happy Birthday to Nelson Mandela. Today is his ninety-second birthday. He is a wonderful man who has done so much for our country.” That’s an expression of cultural competence!

Cheers to the “rainbow nation”. You have given a renewed sense of cultural competence and purpose to others and have earned the right to blow your horn (vuvuzelas!).

Can't your organization use a healthy infusion of inspiration, motivation or training in Leadership, Decision-making, Communication, Ethics or Team-Building? I can provide a keynote, workshop, seminar or individual coaching tailored to meet your needs and help you and your team **RISE**. Email [Beau@PleaseRise.com](mailto:Beau@PleaseRise.com).

Judge Beau Patterson

PO Box 24008

Hilton Head Island, SC 29925-4008

(843) 342-7473

Facsimile: (843) 342-7470

*“Actually, it's not that most people don't have much and they just want a little; It's that they have it all and they just want a little.” -Anonymous*

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