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## Every Tariq, Debbie & Hari – The Unique Australian Advantage

With all the negativity surrounding the Sydney siege, Abbott's stop the boats program and the recent Charlie Hebdo terrorism attack, you'd be forgiven for thinking a multicultural workforce is not only bad for business but bad for all parts of Australian life. With the many religions, cultural customs, work ethics, language barriers, discrimination (open and hidden), the never-ending unrest in the "motherlands" and with the unavoidable, wall-to-wall media coverage, how is it possible to make it all work in harmony. But, on balance, and on any measure, it does work and as far as history tells us, it has been working well for a very long time. Consider, for a moment, approximately one-third of us were born overseas, coming from more than 200 nations all with unique languages, sub-languages and dialects.

And as much as we criticise the political class for many things they get wrong, our leaders over the years have managed to get the integration of this very diverse mix of cultures pretty well spot on and Australia has been much better for it. But who is an "Australian"? Our relatively short history can define it as ..... an indigenous or other person with the bloodline of another country but fully committed to Australia.

Against all the good intentions of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*, unfortunately, there are still businesses that only target, covertly of course, a workforce with traditional anglo-saxon names, accents and traditions. The best businesses don't – these savvy organisations not only reap the direct benefits of getting the right person for the job but also the other benefits that multiculturalism brings to the business. So what are some of these benefits? I can think of three but I'm sure there are many more.

1. **Import and Export Opportunities:** Migrants bring with them, unique knowledge, external relationships and recommendations. The unique overseas-based supplier hidden from google, a potential agent or distributor for your business's product back in the mother country – a sample of the opportunities that may open up. The new employee's ability to understand first-hand the customs and converse fluently is a massive boost to the business keen explore import/export opportunities with their country of origin. Consider the 3-week long Asian Cup football tournament played in Australia throughout January. Take note of the strong local supporter base of what many would consider "obscure" countries such as Uzbekistan, Qatar, Oman and others such as Iran, Iraq, UAE, etc. The local Chinese supporters at the Australia v China quarter-final played in Brisbane was many thousands strong with a record breaking 27 million TV viewers back in China. Due to their commitment to Australia and strong ties to their country of origin, a strong local migrant presence will help to strengthen brand Australia. The local businesses that understand and tap into this will benefit.
2. **Diverse and Innovative Thinking:** It is common knowledge that the more inputs, as wild and wacky they might seem at first, the greater the chance of the next big idea for your business. Therefore, it makes sense, that if you add cultural diversity into this mix, the quantity and quality of ideas will only increase. If you want to tap into the wants, needs and mindset of the large Indian market, who better to have in your focus group, than an employee with a strong Indian heritage.
3. **The World Socialising Locally:** Every employer knows that adding a social element to the routine of work helps with employee morale, overall wellbeing and teamwork. If encouraged and managed well, employees from many backgrounds add diversity to the normal work routine – the commonality of work is positively influenced by the different unique experiences of the employees. A workgroup consisting of employees with the same background could end up very one-dimensional with little to no unique experiences to add to the group. The movement "Taste of Harmony" builds on this idea of diversity within the

workplace – [www.tasteofharmony.org.au](http://www.tasteofharmony.org.au) . Having a monthly sporting event which communicates at all levels across all nationalities, such as football (aka soccer) helps to convert employee cultural diversity into great teamwork.

So, in the afterglow of our annual celebration as a nation, Australia Day, let us make sure we do not work against cultural diversity but rather make all efforts to embrace it. Embrace the many opportunities it presents, embrace the opportunity the expansion of ideas and innovative thinking that many cultures, religions and backgrounds will bring to your business. And, of course, the social diversity it can bring to the workplace can be a boost to the overall wellbeing of your employees and this can only be good for your business. Let Tariq, Debbie and Hari enlighten your world and your business.

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