

**World Café focusing on Diversity  
YP Nashville – 20:20 Leadership Alliance  
June 21, 2006**

**Process**

The 20:20 Leadership Alliance, a coalition of the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce, Nashville Area Junior Chamber of Commerce, Society of Leaders in Development (SOLID), Urban League Young Professionals and Young Leaders Council, hosted a networking activity based on the principles set forth by The World Café ([www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com)) on June 21, 2006 at Sunset Grill. The event was promoted through area young professional organizations, Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce member communications, the Nashville GLBT Chamber, as well as various community groups.

The 52 participants were grouped in tables of 3-4 to discuss a set of questions dealing with the Nashville area's diversity issues. Three questions were addressed during the session. Participants moved to different tables after each question to continue their discussion with a different set of people. All participants were encouraged to write their answers, thoughts, comments on paper provided on their table. Participants were also encouraged to bring their insights from the previous questions with them as they moved the conversation.

The final segment of the evening was a round-table discussion of the findings, issues, and a-ha moments participants found through the activity. A complete summary of those statements is included in this report.

**The three questions the participants discussed were:**

1. How do stereotypes affect your perceptions of other people – both in and out of your race/ethnicity/lifestyle?
2. How do we, personally, make Nashville more inclusive?
3. How do/can I live diversity at home, work & play?

## **Summary**

Nashville is already a diverse community. Data from the 2000 U.S. Census show that the population breakdown of Nashville is 65% White, 28% Black, 3% Asian and 6% of Hispanic or Latino origin. Additionally, 10.1% of the population speak a language other than English at home. These numbers do not even begin to address the differences in religion, lifestyle or social classes. The general feeling among participants was not how diverse is Nashville but of how do we encourage inclusion among many different people.

Personal responsibility was cited as crucial to Nashville embracing diversity and achieving true inclusion among its residents. All people want to be treated fairly, so embrace the people next door or across the street. Step outside of your own personal boundaries, be accepting of new ideas, and find the common denominator between yourself and someone who is not like you.

Education was also discussed as a need to encourage diversity and inclusion. Although stereotypes are a part of human nature, most are formed before ever getting to know another person. Many stereotypes are a result of the values of our parents and other family members. As Young Professionals, it is our responsibility to be the bridge between past belief systems and changing future perceptions to be more inclusive. We need to work hard to instill in today's youth a sense of oneness for Nashville to grow and be a truly strong community.

"Diversity in Nashville is the Haves versus the Have Nots" is a direct quote from one participant. A large part of the discussion centered around the issue of diversity not being about racism but about class-ism. As YPs, we need to focus not just on learning about people of different races or beliefs than our own but also be aware of and spend time with people of different economic backgrounds. An additional comment indicated that even the YP group was not diverse enough (educated, white collar participants) on an economic level to really delve into discussions affected by low education, poverty and other class issues such as hate crime, gang and discrimination issues.

Many of the participants also felt that the external perception of Nashville contributes to a lack of inclusiveness among all of its people. While residents of Nashville primarily

accept the diversity of the region, the perception outside of our community is still often that of a small southern town or often even as a “horse and buggy” community. These perceptions lead to the need for continued education among new residents and people outside of our region on today’s Nashville.

The final challenge to all participants was to get out and spend time with someone not like yourself – invite someone to have a cup of coffee, drinks or dinner. True diversity will require a paradigm shift. Each person must experience diversity on an individual basis and make decisions for themselves. Participants should take time to have an appreciation for walking in someone else’s shoes – attend a cultural event, get out of your comfort zone, do not be comfortable in our own ignorance of issues. The World Café event was not a solution to all diversity issues and problems. It was an opportunity for the participants to begin true discourse and put the issue on the table. It is now up to us to take the steps to encourage inclusion throughout the community.

#### **Town Hall Feedback:**

- Treat people as people
- Awareness
- Not just about diversity but inclusion
- People are all the same
- Appreciation of walking someone else’s shoes
- Not as much about race as class-ism
- Need more discourse
- Nashville is very diverse but not embracing it. Nashville is also not recognized in other places as being diverse.
- It’s our (YPs) responsibility to be the bridge.
- Every man’s ability may be strengthened or increased by culture.
- Attend a council meeting and challenge use of the term “firemen” vs. “fire fighter. Ask their views on diversity.
- We all want to be treated fairly
- Diversity is the reality in which we live. Inclusion is the goal.
- Experience things on an individual basis.
- Gandhi – “If you want to change it has to begin within.”

- Embrace the people next door or across the street. Step outside of your boundaries.
- Be accepting of new ideas.
- Squash the stereotypes!
- Personal responsibility—crucial to diversity. Requires a paradigm shift. “BSM” Benefits Strategies Measurement. What actions do you engage to show paradigm shift?
- Take a breath, step back, form thoughts.
- Perception of Nashville is often still a horse & buggy town.
- We need to know and understand that we are already diverse.
- Walk the Walk – don’t just talk about it. Get out of your comfort zone.
- Find the common denominator that is disarming and inviting.

**From the Tables:**

- Stereotypes passed down from parents/family members
- Stereotypes are usually formed before you even know the person.
- Perception of self-stereotype: male v. female
- Stereotypes create artificial barriers/keep you boxed in.
- It is human nature to have some stereotypes.
- Stand up for what you believe in. Speak up.
- Outcome of stereotypes: Not allowing the person to honestly show themselves before you form an opinion.
- We should not be comfortable in our ignorance.
- Knowledge. Education. Lead by positive example. Think for your self.
- How to live diversity? Be comfortable with yourself. Ask questions.
- Youth can be turning tide.
- Events like this make dialogue easily accessible.
- Try something new! Go to events in Nashville that exhibit cultural diversity.
- The more you learn; the more you grow. When you close your mind there will never be change!
- Do something!
- Be the change you want to see in the world.
- Shop locally.

- How do we create an inclusive culture? EDUCATE! Examine. Reform. Prioritize Education.
- Be aware of and explore spending time with people of different economic backgrounds.
- Nashville is becoming diverse—but without inclusiveness we are limiting ourselves, our growth and our creativity.
- Prejudice based on superficial physical attributes (color, sex, etc) as opposed to internalized attributes (sexual orientation, education, religion.)
- Diversity in Nashville is “Haves” v. “Have Nots.” Not racial.
- Embrace differences!
- Walk As One – October 7, 2006 at Centennial Park
- Gently educate & include

### **From Survey Monkey**

- I had a thought as I returned home the evening of the event, and it was that diversity is more likely to occur in urban environments. It might be interesting to discuss this theory in the group, and what it means to a growing city like Nashville. In my experience, I've lived in small towns in foreign countries (Finland and Germany), and I was ostracized much like I think "foreigners" are in smaller towns here in the US. Also, it goes without saying that big cities like New York City or Boston or Los Angeles are more diverse in terms of population. I just see a connection, and think it fits Nashville's increasing growth pattern.
- For dialogue to occur, not just gotta tell people up front that they have permission -- even a mandate -- repeatedly to challenge (nicely, of course) statements they hear at their tables that they consider false, inaccurate, unfounded. We're socialized strongly not to disagree, and certainly not to disagree repeatedly. I found that I wanted on at least three occasions in each conversation to relate why I believed statements made were inaccurate according to my experience. In each case, I'd stop at one mild demurral because we're socialized not to repeatedly disagree with people. It's not nice. For instance, I heard many people talk about how we can become a more inclusive, embracing city without people having their values challenged. That is not accurate. Treating all humans with respect at all times is not the norm. Any change in the norm is challenging. When

we judge others to be less worthy than we are, we apply our values. Our values are often the reason we fail to respect the dignity of others. It is challenging to have our received opinions about other people challenged.

- I feel like the focus was on white and black and not on all aspects of true diversity. Diversity issues affect others besides those who are white or black. I would have liked to hear more feedback or had more discussion on real solutions on inclusion.
- This was a powerful group. We need a strategy to provoke change at large. One such meeting creates momentary enthusiasm, but must be maintained through follow-up meetings.
- While it was a solid starting point for discussion, the World Cafe included only a narrow demographic (educated, white collar) of the Nashville / Middle Tennessee area. It seemed that most people at this function did not want to discuss the real problems that result as a lack of diversity education (hate crimes, discrimination, etc.). Until we can have an open forum on these subjects, we have not truly addressed the diversity issue.
- I would like to see some ideas coming from the conversations.
- My feeling is that Nashville is actually very diverse in its cultures, religions, ethnicities, and political views. We need to work to welcome and embrace these differences and not label someone before we have gotten to know them. We need to work even harder to instill this into our youth of Nashville for us to grow and be a strong community.
- Solidarity can be defined as a union of interests or purpose within a particular social group. A social group can be a group of people that have something in common, anything from race, gender, age group or occupation to religion, sexuality, or general interest...the list is virtually endless. Early French sociologist Emile Durkheim, considered by many to be the father of sociology, termed solidarity based on commonalities mechanical solidarity. He also observed a

second type of solidarity, that which arises from the differences within a group, Durkheim which he called organic solidarity. Those qualities which are individual, unique or specialized actually create an interdependence on one another within the group. Durkheim comments on this phenomenon in his popular work *The Division of Labor in Society*: "In one case as in the other, the structure derives from the division of labor and its solidarity. Each part of the animal, having become an organ, has its proper sphere of action where it moves independently without imposing itself upon others. But, from another point of view, they depend more upon one another than in a colony, since they cannot separate without perishing." (1933, p.192, Durkheim, Emile. 1933. *The Division of Labor in Society* Translated by George Simpson. New York: The Free Press.) Durkheim's study speaks to the diversity among persons within a social group. In a modern society, which seems to be increasingly diverse with regards to the interaction of various social groups, seeking solidarity not only within the respective social groups but between the differing groups seems to be a logical and necessary step. While the crowd gathered that evening to discuss diversity was just a small sample of the social groups represented within Middle Tennessee and conversations may have been cluttered and off-topic at times, it was a good place to start. A positive way to advocate diversity in this community is to, first, learn about and, second, develop a dependency upon other social groups – or strive for organic solidarity. Ask questions. Have honest dialog with someone from a different social group than yourself with the purpose of learning more about that group. Remember that a dialog is not a one-way street: if you ask an honest question don't be shocked or offended by the honest answer you receive. Learn each other's strengths and weaknesses. Durkheim's principle of organic solidarity can be expanded to work not just within, but between the diverse social groups. By observing, celebrating and utilizing the differences that exist between us, we will not only promote Nashville's growing diversity, but we will build a city in which we rely upon our diversities for an exceptional life experience, a city in which we "...cannot separate without perishing."

- If this issue was to be discussed further I would like to see people represented that don't have a big income, since it came up a few times that, that can be something we stereotype.

- I believe that the event went well. Going back to one of the questions in this survey, you must realize that although we were able to talk freely about diversity at the this event, it still may not be a topic that can be discussed as freely in a different setting.
  
- There is a local Caucasian woman (Molly Somebody?? maybe Secours?) who writes and speaks eloquently about the "white privilege" she and other Caucasians take for granted. She might be an appropriate speaker for raising awareness of that angle of diversity. Many of us are almost entirely unaware of the challenges faced daily by people of color, because we don't have the same experiences they have. Also, although it's certainly no fault of YP that the current demographics are what they are and no reflection on the sincerity or quality of the current membership, I wonder if additional outreach into the Latino and Kurdish communities might bring other voices to the table.

**Other questions to be addressed at future World Cafes:**

- What barriers do you see to diversity?
- How have stereotypes affected your life and peoples perceptions of you?
- What are the challenges to creating or encouraging inclusion in Nashville and how can we overcome them?
- Something a little meatier I think - like really delving into the stereotypes question and how racism (and other isms) come into play in our lives
- Next steps for the group at large
- How can we reach out to those who do not accept diversity?
- What are the greatest misconceptions about you? What will you do differently given the opportunity to discuss diversity today?
- In Nashville, is every economic background diverse?
- What life experiences created your prejudices & stereotypes? Can you move past that to break them? If so, how?
- Ways individuals have gotten over/past stereotypes, including learning to recognize that he has them.