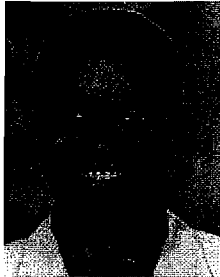


Time for change on race

To bridge racial divides, leaders first must change their own behavior.

07.17.2006 -



By Ty Davis

During a recent facilitation of a diversity workshop for 25 freshman scholarship students at East Carolina University that was designed as an introduction to the importance of understanding differences, I noticed that the room was racially divided, with one table of all black students and the remaining four tables of all white students.

A few weeks later, I facilitated a panel for the community service projects performed by the same student, and the panel of guests repeated the same pattern as the students.

This time the panel consisted of six professional staff members -- three on the left of the panel who were black, and three on the right who were white.

Coincidence? I don't think so.

This observation is not new to me as I have experienced the same separatism in too many situations to count.

Admittedly, I am guilty of the same behavior I have noticed in so many others. I am inclined to gravitate to people who look like me, seem the same as me.

I would like to venture that this is not just an act of personal preference but one that many of us subconsciously facilitate or embrace.

I would coin this behavior as "subconscious self-segregation."

My thinking and experience tell me that many around the world can relate to having seen or been a part of this same situation numerous times. I want to believe it's not something we deliberately do, but perhaps it is.

Leaders in academia, in the religious sector, in public education, and politic are proud to announce our efforts to increase multicultural understanding and appreciation.

But I find myself guilty of subconscious self-segregation behavior, and I know my colleagues do, too.

How much is this behavior doing to support our multicultural intentions?

Dr. Martin Luther King said, "Men hate each other because they fear each other, and they fear each other because they don't know each other, and they don't know each other because they are often separated from each other."

As leaders in our communities, our churches and synagogues, and our places of employment, how often are we separating ourselves from those we are responsible to lead and from those who are different from

us?

We must ask ourselves, "Where is my commitment to diversity and multiculturalism that challenges me to personally cross lines of differences?"

I wonder how much segregation is caused by those of us who are appointed or selected as leaders to help eliminate the racial divide?

Let's change our own behavior first.

Ty Davis is a 2001-03 William C. Friday Fellow for Human Relations and admissions counselor at Pitt Community College in Greenville, N.C.

<http://philanthropyjournal.org/lu.cfm?lu=12978>