

The Do's and Don'ts of Diversity* Hiring

The WGC diversity committee has created a list of “Diversity Hiring Do’s and Don’ts” as part of its ongoing efforts to promote the voices of Indigenous people, people of colour, LGBTQ+, and people with disabilities within the Guild, as well as to increase members’ understanding of the challenges faced by diverse screenwriters and to address issues of diversity-based discrimination in conjunction with the Guild and its council. Adam Barken, showrunner of *Killjoys*, notes that when reading the do’s and don’ts some may react with a mix of “Hey cool, I’ve done that” and “Oh crap... I’ve done that,” pointing out that we’re in a transition period in both our culture and industry. “It’s been too long in coming,” says Adam, “and it’s probably

going to take more time than any of us would like to get there. Change is hard. And we’re going to screw up sometimes. Take that as a given and keep trying to do better. In the meantime, let’s also be grateful to have the WGC diversity committee, who wrote this list to help point out some basic do’s and don’ts on the way to a richer, more inclusive world.”

So, you’re working in a room that includes Indigenous, POC, LGBTQ+, or people with disabilities and it’s never happened before. Don’t panic! Here are a few tips to make things less awkward. (Notwithstanding, of course, that most writers are just inherently awkward).

- DO** ask us what our opinions are. Start with opinions on lunch, because we’re writers first. Then build to more culturally sensitive topics.
- DO** listen and believe what we say about our lived experiences. Think of it like this — you wouldn’t hire a medical consultant and then refute their expert knowledge.
- DO** treat writers who check the diversity box as actual people outside of that box. Because spoiler alert — we are!
- DO** check in to see how we’re doing and reiterate that our difference in opinions and perspectives are valued.
- DO** flip the script! And ask the CIS, white, able-bodied writers what living with those privileges has been like.
- DO** attempt to tell rich, nuanced stories with the help of your shiny new diverse writers room.
- DO** acknowledge how much richer the stories are with more diversity in writers’ rooms, on screen, and on set.
- DO** hire more than one of us in the room. You’ll find the depth and breadth of conversation can go deeper and be more nuanced for your characters.
- DO** create space for the conversation. Provide the ACCEPTANCE and allow the SILENCE so a new voice can be heard. Voicing a diverse opinion from the most vulnerable seat in the writers’ room requires security and opportunity.

- DON’T** only ask us to weigh in on our “diverse specialty.”
- DON’T** expect us to be an expert on every race, sexual orientation, or disability. Or to speak for an entire race like it’s a monolith. Just like you wouldn’t ask a neurosurgeon about the weird rash on your butt. Or if all butts are the same.
- DON’T** say things like, “I don’t see colour.” Unless you’re talking to your eye doctor.
- DON’T** ask us to bring the ethnic food to the wrap party.
- DON’T** get hyper defensive when talking about race. If a writer is talking about an uncomfortable experience with your race, they’re not saying it’s your fault.
- DON’T** be disheartened when you can’t cure inequality with your show. Or one episode. Or in a six-minute B plot.
- DON’T** expect cookies for doing so. But maybe cupcakes, if craft services is good.
- DON’T** complain that white men can’t get jobs anymore. ‘Coz they still do!
- DON’T** be afraid to ask questions or make mistakes. It’s a great opportunity to learn.

**We may contain multitudes, but no single person is diverse. The definition of diverse is “showing a great deal of variety.” It is not the token person in a room; it is the combination of different people in a room. It is including voices different than — but of equal value to — your own. It is bringing together a group of people that better reflects our society.*