

## TIPS FOR DIVERSIFYING THE ORGANIZATION.

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Does your organization value diversity? Do you know why you should? Are you promoting diversity? How do you obtain buy-in and support? Those of us charged with increasing the diversity of the workforce are well acquainted with the frustration of trying to explain the value and obtain buy-in. Here are a few tips to help you put a diversity initiative into action.

Many times, an organization's leadership has a firm commitment to diversity but has not implemented a plan successfully. Often, middle managers, supervisors, and line staff are unable to tie the relevance of diversity to their daily tasks. Sometimes HR is charged with rolling out the initiative without really having the power, support, or authority to effect the organizational change. Without a full top-down commitment to diversity and a strategic plan in place, your program will have a difficult time going anywhere.

There are a number of good reasons why you should create and leverage a diverse workforce. As a government agency or government contractor, you have a legal obligation to both implement an affirmative action plan and work toward meeting EEO goals relative to the local workforce availability. As a private for-profit entity, you may be missing out on some lucrative niche marketing opportunities and the rewards that come from marketing to minority and other underrepresented groups. As a not-for-profit agency, you will be able to provide your clients with better service if you more accurately reflect the community that you serve.

In every work environment, the simple fact is that homogenous environments become stagnant. There is an old saying that: "If you always do what you always did, you will always get what you always got." If what you always got works for you, then don't waste your time on a diversity initiative; however, if you are losing market share or not providing the service that you should because you are not changing with the times, you may want to consider the value of a diversity initiative. Diversity of thought creates a fertile field for new ideas and innovation—and providing equal employment opportunities to everyone is simply the right thing to do.

There are really three ways to approach diversity in your workplace. First, you can ignore it and eventually go out of business. In the not-too-distant future of this country, those individuals who are collectively classified as minorities will become the majority. These people are your future customer base, and you will want to earn customer loyalty now. Second, you can continue to operate in a reactive mode and maintain only the bare minimum efforts necessary to support an affirmative action plan. But then, you are not really creating opportunities for your organization or for underrepresented groups. Lastly, you can be proactive, promote diversity as a way of life, move beyond the minimum standards and create: a strong, competitive, vibrant and productive workforce; an organization where everyone is valued; and marketing opportunities that did not previously exist.

A Diversity Initiative identifies five distinct areas that need to be aligned in order to create this new paradigm:

### 1. Top-Down Commitment

As previously stated, you have to start with a top-down commitment. Identify and elucidate your “Business Case for Diversity.” Align it with your organization’s mission and vision. This Business Case will be different for each of us depending on the type of organization that we manage. Have your hiring managers and front-line supervisors help you craft the initiative. They need to see that diversity is a management priority and strategic business goal. These individuals will be responsible for implementing the initiative and will ultimately be held accountable for the results. The initiative needs to become ingrained in the organization’s culture. If you involve supervisors in crafting the initiative, they are going to feel empowered, be more likely to work toward the common goal, and ultimately become champions of the cause. These individuals can then serve to promote the initiative throughout your organization. Sufficiently fund the initiative; put your money where your mouth is. Fold the initiative into the rewards and recognition program so that people see, on a day-to-day basis, that not only management, but others, as well, value diversity and are being rewarded as a result.

### 2. Recruitment

Create opportunities for various members of the organization to interact with groups that they normally would not. Invite managers/supervisors to attend career fairs, colleges, and conferences frequented by people of color in order to take direct action and ownership of the recruiting process. Make community connections and stay active. Create the networks that are going to funnel diverse talent in your direction. Use affinity publications, web sites, alumni job boards, etc., in order to spread the word about your vacancies. Set some goals. Make the goals part of the performance review process and measure the hiring manager’s progress toward those goals. Join your local Diversity Consortium, or, if you don’t have one, create one. Network, network, network. It’s all about the connections.

### 3. Retention

Create an environment where everyone feels safe, welcome, and valued. Perform climate surveys. For small organizations, this can be as simple as having lunch or coffee with your diverse employees on a periodic basis to gather their opinions, suggestions, and ideas for making the workplace more welcoming. For larger organizations, perform periodic climate assessments that might be broken out by division and/or work group in order to identify climate deficiencies and create opportunities for improvement. The survey should be designed to assess the inclusiveness of the organization. Develop a formal and impartial process for judging internal talent, which will lead to promotional opportunities. Evaluate employees consistently and fairly and use the evaluations to create equitable compensation systems. Create a zero tolerance policy with regard to harassment, discrimination, bullying, or other intimidating behavior. Again, your goal is to create a welcoming and respectful work environment in which all employees are safe and comfortable.

#### 4. Accountability

Make diversity and inclusion core competencies that can be evaluated with a performance review process. This gives you an opportunity to clearly identify the managers and supervisors that can work with broad constituencies internally and externally. Leverage these individuals to effect organizational change. Measure success toward your “business case” goals. Make diversity training mandatory for all managers. As part of that training, teach how people of different ages, genders, races, ethnicities, orientations, and abilities interact and/or perceive the world. Many people don’t understand the language of diversity (i.e., individuals with disabilities, people of color, etc.) and do not understand how hurtful an inappropriate choice of words can be. Make cultural competency the norm. Train line managers to educate subordinates. Periodic review keeps diversity in the forefront of their minds.

#### 5. Create a “balanced workforce strategy.”

Measure diversity efforts in the areas of recruitment, retention, succession planning, and promotions. Provide the measurements to all managers so that they can assess how their department or division is doing relative to others within the organization. Work toward common goals. Your diversity and inclusion expectations should measure and evaluate how well supervisors recruit, appoint, treat, manage, and create promotion and retention opportunities in an inclusive environment. If your compensation systems support it, link the successful accomplishment of diversity goals to the compensation package. If not, create other no- or low-cost ways to recognize those who achieve the goals (certificates of appreciation, a lunch, choice parking spot, etc.). Hires and promotions depend upon opportunities to fill vacancies—when all things are equal, require hiring managers to explain why they did not choose to hire an underrepresented candidate. Putting them on the spot, even without negative repercussions, may be enough incentive to give diverse candidates full consideration in the future.

When you provide your employees with the information, tools, resources, and incentives to be better managers and measure the results through the performance evaluation process, you will create the support necessary to diversify the organization—and will reap all of the rewards that come with it.