

Beyond Compliance and Representation: Recruiting a Rich Mix of People Delivers High Performance

While many people often equate equal employment opportunity and affirmative action with diversity recruiting, they may often fail to consider the strategic business case for developing a more diverse and inclusive workforce. With the considerable demographic shift toward a global economy that is characterized by multinationalism and multiculturalism, a high performing workforce requires the same representation as society in order to succeed.

Diversity in the workplace utilizes everyone's skills to the fullest and contributes to overall organizational growth and prosperity. For employers who want to compete for the best talent, they have to consider a number of elements, which means including diverse candidates and providing a culture rich in diversity.

Diversity goes beyond age, ethnicity, disability, gender and sexual orientation. It also means being inclusive of individual differences such as religious affiliations, military status and individual work style. A person's background and life experiences will inevitably affect his or her approach to work. Organizations with clearly defined, well-executed and ongoing plans to diversify their workforce are able to take advantage of a variety of perspectives, leading to more creative and innovative thinking in meeting their customer's needs, provide a more widely-appealing work environment that retains top talent and broaden their global business reach.

Diversity recruiting and inclusion is a strategy to attract, retain and develop the necessary talent to grow and sustain an organization. Companies that want to be successful today need to proactively use diversity and inclusion practices to their advantage to effectively harness the full range of perspectives, knowledge and experiences that are available to create a competitive advantage.

Shifting Demographics

Because of confusion or lack of commitment to the concept of workplace diversity, many organizations fail to practice proactive diversity recruitment and inclusion. Instead, they take a reactive approach by confusing diversity with compliance. Equal employment opportunity and affirmative action are legal drivers of diversity. They are initiated by government regulations and focus more on hiring practices rather than how the business will be impacted by the people that represent the company and contribute to its success.

Proactive workplace diversity is a much broader effort to maintain a workforce that more accurately represents the diversification and globalization of today's society. In projections released by the U.S. Census Bureau, the nation's Hispanic and Asian populations are expected to triple over the next half century and non-Hispanic whites would represent about one-half of the total populations by 2050. Additionally, according to Hewitt Associates, by 2008, women and minorities will represent 70 percent of the new labor force entrants. Combined with other changes such as an aging workforce—and four generations working side-by-side—it is easy to see that the implications of these demographic shifts are significant and require a strategic approach to building a more diverse workforce.

But diversity recruiting is not just a consideration in the U.S. alone. For example, in France, diversity is identified by the number of Muslims from French colonies the organization employs. Similarly, in The Netherlands, diversity is viewed by the number of Suriname, Iraqi, Iranian and Afghani immigrants a company hires. Yet each country defines diversity and inclusion differently. Sexual orientation and ethnicity or race are not considered diversity factors by most European governments. But in Ireland, diversity in the workforce is often defined as being Catholic or Protestant. Because of the patchwork of diversity



provisions globally, it is important that organizations are globally minded with regard to diversity and inclusion practices.

Because workplace diversity goes beyond demographics, such as sexual orientation, military status or ethnicity, accommodating various needs such as flexible hours or instituting a telecommuting policy furthers an organization's ability to support individual differences. Addressing differences in management style or work environments that affect productivity are also part of workplace diversity. By addressing workplace diversity and inclusiveness, organizations are able to not only promote understanding of employee needs, but inspire innovative thinking and inventive product development.

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While some employers realize they need an inclusive workforce, many fail to give diversity and inclusion the focus and attention it deserves. For example, there may be fear in managing a workforce that is diverse. With diversity comes complexity and additional challenges in creating a work environment that addresses individual needs and creates cultural synergy. However, managing diversity is about getting all employees to perform to their potential by tapping the capabilities of all workforce members. Organizations may also not actively pursue diversity recruiting because they get pigeon-holed into building a workforce that mirrors their executive board and/or the existing workforce. While similarity can breed familiarity, it can also result in a workforce that is stagnant with limited viewpoints, ideas and attitudes, and may not grow as broadly as its contemporaries.

Companies without a diverse workforce are at a competitive disadvantage because they are not recruiting based on the wide spectrum of talent. Author Norma Carr-Ruffino in her book, "Making Diversity Work," indicates "the most innovative, profitable organizations are filled with people who express a wide variety of worldviews, values and customs, norms and style in an increasingly diverse and global marketplace." Diversity recruiting and inclusion contribute to the bottom line by making it easier to penetrate new markets; find and retain skilled, versatile employees; lower costs by developing a wide range of skills in-house; and developing a reputation as an employer of choice that helps attract new employees.

Implementing Diversity Recruiting and Inclusion Strategies

Having a proactive diversity strategy allows businesses to benefit from an expanded talent pool to gain a competitive edge and better serve customer needs. Diversity recruiting is a process—not an event. It requires a long-term, ongoing investment to support an organization's mission of being an employer of choice.

Organizations with clearly defined plans and a serious commitment to diversify their workforce are doing so not just to mirror society, but

rather to employ the best overall talent to increase competitiveness in the marketplace. To ensure a successful process, it is crucial that diversity and inclusion programs have strong executive support in establishing diversity as a business goal. Furthermore, buy-in across all levels of the organization is vital to a successful, ongoing program. Managing diversity can also be improved by engaging a recruiting and retention partner to design and execute a strategic diversity recruitment program in an ongoing basis.

Demonstrating a strategic approach to diversity recruiting requires a process that links to the organization's strategic operating plan. The process needs to incorporate various touch points including communicating a clear employee value proposition, articulating strong multi-cultural employment branding, establishing relationships with targeted affinity groups and taking advantage of solutions such as employee engagement surveys to measure results and initiate change. Employers can no longer hire people of the same age, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation and expect to be leaders in their respective industries. Diversity and inclusion in the workplace enhances organizational flexibility, fosters an innovative and creative approach to problem solving, and can help companies move into new markets while reaching a wider range of customers.

Diversity sourcing utilizing multiple channels is one benefit offered through a recruiting and retention solutions partner, which offers an opportunity for organizations to reach and recruit top-quality candidates. If employers want to effectively compete for the best talent available, they need to consider all options, including reaching out to visibly diverse candidates. By establishing relationships with historically black colleges and universities, women's colleges and colleges with high enrollments of Hispanic or other diverse students, a solutions partner can help to attract a large number of potential candidates.

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Diversity job fairs sponsored by local governments or community organizations in major metropolitan areas can also be used to source candidates and build awareness of each organization. By collaborating with marketing to develop updated branded materials or product displays that incorporate multicultural themes, organizations can visually convey their commitment to diversity and inclusion and promote it to potential job candidates.

Establishing long-term relationships with targeted affinity groups, multicultural organizations, local community groups, colleges and universities, professional organizations, unions, military and veterans groups, suppliers, organizations for disabled citizens and charitable foundations also pays dividends when defining a diversity strategy. These targeted affinity groups can offer a viable source for finding

potential prospects and include organizations such as the National Urban League, National Association of Asian-American Professionals, National Council of La Raza and the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Additionally, the military has proven to be an excellent source for highly skilled, dedicated employees who possess the work ethic valued by today's progressive employers.

Employment Branding also delivers a competitive edge to help maintain market share, maximize profitability and achieve ongoing success. Branded materials or product displays should incorporate multicultural themes that are relevant to multicultural recruitment, development and retention. According to research from Maritz Research, a leader in customer satisfaction and loyalty research, nearly half of all American workers (49 percent) indicate that their company's brand or image played a key role in their decision to apply for a job with their respective employers. By marketing a company as a desirable place to work that embraces diversity and having a targeted strategy to manage awareness and perceptions of employees, organizations can leverage their brand to drive recruitment and retention.

Aside from assembling a workforce that reflects the real world in terms of demographics and work styles, there is a clear business case to be made for workplace diversity and inclusion. Organizations with clearly defined plans to diversify their workforce are able to grow from a variety of perspectives, leading to more creative and innovative thinking that meets their customer's needs, reaches a wider range of customers, breaks into new markets and retains top performers. By having a rich mix of people and fostering an environment that promotes understanding, inclusion and diversity, organizations are able to build an inclusive, yet cohesive workforce that enables them to not only compete, but thrive.

By embracing and nurturing diversity and inclusion, organizations can rise above the competition as an employer of choice to ultimately build and sustain a high performing workforce. ■

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