

BEYOND DIVERSITY: BUILDING CULTURES OF INCLUSION:

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As organizations began to focus more deeply on their people agendas, there's a growing awareness that diversity terminology has become almost outdated, even politically incorrect. I don't mean to suggest that organizations are moving away from their diversity agendas. Rather, large organizations that were long considered early pioneers in the diversity movement over the past 10 years—Fortune 100 companies such as JPMorganChase, IBM, BankofAmerica and Xerox, among them--are no longer devoting their efforts single mindedly to justifying the business case for a diversity agenda. They have become more integrative, focusing their efforts on fostering an 'inclusive' environment.

In today's rebounding economy, there are many good reasons for these organizations to do this. First, many CEOs want their top performers to be the best business people, and they are committed to exploring the middle management pipeline to identify and cultivate talent within the ranks. They have discovered that, much to the surprise of senior management and to the chagrin of middle managers, that these pipelines are not only filled with talent, but also happen to be stocked with a wide variety of ethnicity, race and gender.

Second, they have discovered that when we begin to foster the development of these individuals by mentoring them and even cultivating one or two of these "seedlings" to the next level-through sponsorships, networking opportunities and even stretch assignments, there's tremendous payback for the individuals and the organizations.

Building an inclusive environment not only helps CEOs and top level managers cultivate their next leaders from middle management who also happen to fall among the ranks of different genders, races, and ethnicities, but it also helps to develop and foster those individuals of various backgrounds who may not be on anyone's radar screen.

Inclusiveness is really about the expanded potential of all who are willing to demonstrate their abilities. Inclusiveness implies a sense of one taking responsibility to be included rather than expecting to be included because of skin color, origin or orientation. Inclusiveness allows the space for risk taking and making mistakes, but quickly learning from those errors, and moving on to the next level.

As a practitioner in this field, I must admit that I become a bit embarrassed when I hear or am forced to use the "D" word around senior executives. I prefer inclusiveness primarily because it instills a sense of community and integration rather than a segregation or separation of identities. With inclusiveness, folks will feel valued and also part of the decision-making process, rather than feeling- "I am being selected because I'm the token Asian or am I being selected because I'm "out" and gay or lesbian?

For those organizations that have just begun establishing their diversity agenda, switching gears to focus to inclusiveness may be the last thing they want to hear. But the efforts are well worth

the task. Not only will a focus on inclusiveness help business leaders of Fortune 100 companies expand their pool of talent, but it will help their organizations return on investment and enhance shareholder value. Numerous studies have been conducted through the Catalyst organization indicating that Diverse teams lead to successful and profitable returns on diverse recruitment.

The Path to Inclusiveness

Many prominent Fortune 100 companies have switched their focus from a diversity agenda to an environment focused on inclusiveness. How did they start? Here are some suggestions on fostering an integrative culture.

- Examine employee morale, turnover and promotions. First assess your company morale. Is there a lot of rumor mill-noise floating around? Also, look for patterns of resignation among your most talented people. When we look at the largest factor surrounding employee satisfaction, we have learned that it's mostly about the level of respect and opportunity employees are given from their direct managers one on one and "around the meeting room table" in front of their colleagues and senior managers. With that in mind, take a look at the turnover in middle management, including females, males, people of color, as well as Associates and those with less than 5 years of service in your company. Is there a pattern? What are the costs of losing these recruits?

You should also examine recruiting and promotional patterns. When was the last time you got promoted or offered an opportunity for a move? When was the last time you hired the "right person" for the job-not the "diversity candidate"?

- *Conduct a climate study.* Your goal here should be to assess how well your organization is performing compared to the competition as well as the entire industry. Also, to explore the last time, if applicable, a new idea was implemented and celebrated by someone other than a senior officer. Other issues to explore: How often do you encourage input from all members of a meeting? When was the last time you took the time to thank your staff for a job well done?
- *Allow employees to 'shine.'* Given the opportunity to shine in a friendly, inviting and supportive environment, individuals will take the bait and go out of their way to present good ideas. Keep in mind that this level of risk-taking frightens most managers because they are fearful that the staff will not perform at the level of expectation for senior management--consequently, making them "look bad". Regardless, it is critical that leaders strive to foster cultures that encourage risk taking. Plans that go awry are not to be considered inherently bad, but rather good lessons for learning. These "lessons learned" could be integrated into new and enhanced ways of running businesses and organizations.
- *Create circles of inclusion and affinity.* Have lunch with a colleague you don't know or who may be from a different part of the world. Move out of your own "comfort zone" and challenge yourself to include somebody in your meeting you know very little about. Challenge your managers to do the same and encourage them to step out of their comfort zones, as well. Lead the Inclusion effort!

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