

5 Strategies for Promoting Diversity in the Workplace

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Strong diversity management can provide organizations with a competitive advantage in the market. As global and regional demographics change, the continued growth of an organization may be dependent on attracting and retaining qualified employees who offer different perspectives and are better able to understand the diverse backgrounds of the customers, clients, and communities they serve. In order to attract and retain these highly desired employees, organizations need to work diligently to incorporate an effective diversity program into the workplace. Below are five strategies to help organizations develop and leverage their diversity programs.

1. **DIVERSITY PROGRAMS MUST BE ALIGNED WITH STRATEGIC PLANS** – One of the keys to the long-term success of a diversity program is to develop a diversity strategy using the same deliberate goal-setting processes used to formulate traditional business-related goals. What is the goal of diversity at your organization? How broad is your diversity focus? Strategic plans around diversity should include quantitative goals along with specific timelines for reaching benchmarks and measuring progress, all of which provide direction and promote action by employees. And, having a well-defined strategy will help your business attain its goals, whether those goals are to provide better service to clients, create a more inclusive workplace culture, recruit and retain highly-qualified and talented diverse employees, and/or implement programs which will create a pipeline of talent for the future.
2. **CREATE A DIVERSITY COMMITTEE** – Employee buy-in is essential to accomplishing the goals of your diversity program. One way to achieve this buy-in is to create a stand-alone diversity committee comprised of members representing all facets of your organization's work force, not just your top executives, and make sure your organization's leadership plays a visible role. Empower the diversity committee to develop a diversity statement which is consistent with your strategic goals and empower the committee to develop programs to support diversity. Such programs may include lunch and learns with featured speakers, diversity workshops, mentoring, community outreach programs and the creation of workplace affinity and employee resource groups.
3. **BECOME INVOLVED IN THE COMMUNITY** – Encourage employees to participate in professional and civic organizations that promote diversity. Involvement with these organizations not only provides excellent networking opportunities, it also fosters collaborations that may enhance access to a larger pool of diverse candidates. Community involvement has the added benefit of strengthening relationship among employees as they come together to serve groups they are passionate about. Many organizations in South Carolina exist that recognize the benefits afforded by a diverse workforce. For example, the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce, the Greenville Chamber of Commerce and the Riley Institute at Furman University have come together with a group of businesses in South Carolina to create the Diversity Recruitment

Consortium. The DRC works together with businesses to develop innovative programs, practices, and processes to increase the diversity of professional and executive talent in South Carolina based organizations.

4. **BE DELIBERATE WITH HIRING PRACTICES** – Growing a diverse work force doesn't just happen - it requires deliberate, intentional conduct. If the pool of qualified applicants you are seeing does not reflect the diverse demographics of the region or the clients you are serving, you may need to expand your search beyond traditional hiring sources. For example, in the legal field, a source for potential candidates is historically black law schools or through regional job fairs, not just recruiting at traditional venues. Of course, diversity goes beyond gender and race. Does your candidate have a passion for the arts or music? Does he or she self-identify a particular religious preference or cultural interest? Many times a candidate won't accept a job because of misperceptions about the diversity (of lack of diversity) of the organization or geographical area. How do you combat those misperceptions? One way is to expose the candidate to a broad range of personnel in the recruiting process; another is to provide your candidate with access to information and people who can address any unique issues or concerns he or she may have. Don't be afraid to think outside the box to "seal the deal."

5. **USE COMPANY INTRANETS** – If you have a company intranet, include a diversity page where the diversity committee can post updates and information about what the organization is doing from a diversity standpoint, upcoming community events and other relevant programs. At Gallivan, White & Boyd (GWB), we introduced an initiative called "Sharing Our Story" which features interviews of different members of the GWB team, highlighting what makes them unique. As our office has grown from one to three locations, this initiative has provided us with an opportunity to get to know employees at our other offices who we don't get a chance to see very often.

Workforce diversity and inclusion promotes employee productivity, retention, team collaboration and commitment, all of which ultimately add value to the services provided to clients. In an increasingly competitive business environment, every advantage is important. A successful diversity program can give organizations an edge if the program is managed correctly, supported by leadership and employees at all levels, and aligns with the business strategies of the organization.

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to diversity is demonstrated not only through their policies and practices, but also by their many civic contributions.”