

WORDS BY LIZ DA ROSA

CRITICAL ISSUES FOR DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

A Leaders Cheat Sheet



*“United We Stand,
Divided We Fall.”*
– Aesop

As an innovative leader you are strategic in the best practices of your product/ services but have you been as thoughtful about developing a diverse workplace culture? Adopting a diversity plan that is actionable is an essential tool for an innovative leader. Leaders can craft actionable plans that can reflect diversity in the workplace in a few easy steps found on this cheat sheet.

What is Diversity?

Books have been written on the definition of diversity, for the sake of this article, I believe the dictionary is a great springboard. The Oxford Dictionary says, “Diversity: A range of different things.” (See Figure 1. Diversity Word Cloud, Categories of Diversity) We could argue about how many differences there should

be and how many should be on the left versus the right but the point here is to realize diversity is simply put a “range,” this is a range that fits the needs of your organization.

Why Leaders Should Care?

If an organization wants to stay competitive they need to be strategic and stay in front of changes. Kim Alton from Glassdoor reminds us about the importance of actively recruiting a wider segment of the market, “When your workplace is home to a diverse group of individuals from different backgrounds and experiences, your company can more effectively market to all groups of consumers...” (*Entrepreneur*, February 9, 2014). Action: Recruit a diverse workforce – they are a ‘must-have’ to maintain or gain a competitive edge.

FIGURE 1: DIVERSITY WORD CLOUD CATEGORIES OF DIVERSITY



Diversity drives innovation – when we limit who can contribute, we in turn limit what problems we can solve.

–Telle Whitney



C.H.E.A.T. Sheet

Here's a cheat-sheet for leaders to add diversity to their workplace by making adjustments to existing business practices.

C: CHECKPOINTS & COMMUNICATION in your existing procedures. There is no need to reinvent business practices to incorporate diversity. The lifecycle of an employee, in most organizations, includes the following: Recruiting, On-boarding, Mentoring and Training/Development (See Figure 2. Action Plans, for practical application). In the recruiting process, for example, review the applicants' self-reported demographic details (voluntary EEOC data already being collected) to see if targeted recruitment efforts may be necessary to attract qualified candidates to reflect more diversity. Hopefully you find a budding superstar in the process! Open communication, at all levels, is key to successful implementation.

H: HIRE an Employment Attorney to conduct/advise on the applicability of federal and state laws for your organization. This will show you where compliance is compulsory and where, if you comply, your organization can be seen as an industry innovator.

E: EXAMINE the state of your organization to see how your workplace culture already embraces and reflects diversity in practice not just principle. This step takes time and a commitment to diversity. Your organization is undoubtedly already



Recruiting:
Target a variety of publications; Show multicultural workplace in visual ads & Attend a variety of F2F career events

Mentoring:
Offer as optional but stress as a part of professional development

T/D: Mandate communications & diversity training for all employees

Onboarding: Materials & process need to reflect organizations diversity goals

FIGURE 2:
ACTION PLANS FOR
PRACTICAL APPLICATION

engaged in a method of collecting employee perception data; think about adding in another method to see if you gain additional details or to validate your current method:

- 1) An anonymous survey
- 2) An outside facilitator to conduct face-to-face discussions
- 3) A suggestion box/email
- 4) Informal polls of employees during team organization-wide meetings

This step shows employees the leaders are genuinely interested in their views and they are helping shape the diversity goals/plan.

A: ASSESS the conscious and unconscious messages your organization/leaders send. Partner with other leaders to address any messages (handbook, policies, SOPs) that are not in line with the organizations diversity goal. Address these inconsistencies and coach resistant leaders or employees.

T: TWEAK the diversity goal and its implementation. Remember that while your organization must follow the laws it is the leaders' responsibility to make it work. A successful leader must finesse the delivery/implementation of diversity in the workplace while maintaining a positive environment where the bottom line is not the sole focus.

Invite people into your life who don't

look or act like you. You might find they challenge your assumptions and make you grow. – Mellody Hobson

Next Steps

Trust the process, give it time and encourage everyone to be honest about what's working and not working. Be open to review the actions that aren't working, make needed changes and celebrate the actions that are effective. Research, get input from colleagues and try other ways of implementing diversity in your organization. Embrace a fluid process of change where diversity will overtime become a seamless part of your workplace culture.

Diversity is essential in organizations that want to continue to grow and stay competitive. Leaders need to nurture diversity if they expect to see it in the organization. A final thought, diversity should enhance your business outcome not harm your product/service. Start this change by talking with other leaders in your organization to see how diversity can become part of the strategic plan then take thoughtful measures to partner with each other to implement diversity within your organization.

Strength lies in differences, not in similarities. – Stephen R. Covey

Reference: Abreu, K. (2014, December 9). *The Myriad Benefits of Diversity in the Workplace*. *Entrepreneur*. <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/240550> Retrieved on August 22, 2016.

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