

Diversity is a Journey

By Jeanetta Garmon

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I've heard that the character of an individual is measured in many ways. It is measured by integrity, words and action. These same measurements are applicable in determining an organization's commitment to diversity and inclusion. For example, does your corporate culture embrace individuals that don't resemble your senior management team? Does your company reject anyone that does not appear to "fit" the corporate image, master the "corporate speak" or "work the dedicated face time (hours)". Has your organization created a culture that has an unintentional intolerance for diversity?

Many organizations philosophically embrace diversity, yet have opportunities progressing because of difficulty discussing, measuring, and openly sharing objectives. When an organization lacks clarity around the business case and objectives for accomplishing diversity, it becomes ambiguous and lacks the support necessary to provide the progress reflective of the overall organizations capability. It is similar to a gerbil on a wheel.

First, develop the business case. Ensure you have top level support, strategies, and clearly defined objectives. Position the diversity and inclusion initiative from the framework of the value proposition, vision, and integrated strategy. Integrate the strategy into the corporate strategy and tie to the core values. Communicate and explain the business case to the organization.

Second, garner support and visible advocates who already have the hearts and souls to support diversity. Use these advocates as the vehicle for change, visible communication both internally to the organization and externally to the community.

Third, determine the action items and resources needed to accomplish the objectives. Work harder to identify, attract, develop, promote and retain minority talent. Develop strong partnerships with organizations that provide the pipeline of talent while working with organizations that can provide access to diverse talent at senior levels (e.g. Universities, NSHMBA, NSBMBAA, Catalyst).

Fourth, leave no talent behind by ensuring your definition of diversity is inclusive of all and not divisive. Weave diversity and inclusion throughout the fabric of the company. Measure and hold people accountable.

Fifth, celebrate the successes as they will occur incrementally and build upon the rich diversity of not only the organization, but also the community that supports the organization. Reward and recognize leaders for their progress and active visible involvement.

Lastly, diversity is about equality not quotas, special treatment nor compromising quality. Diversity is about providing the same opportunity without bias while creating an inclusive and flexible work environment where all people can succeed. Keep in mind that the position of a diversity initiative and the design of its reporting relationships send a strong message about the strategic value of diversity to the organization. Each organizations diversity journey is unique to their culture and will take time to progress. However, don't become too comfortable and patient with the pace of the journey, but gauge the pace and determine what is best for your organization, employees, suppliers and community. As Human Resource professionals we can strategically assist our organizations in their evolution to a culture with intentional tolerance and embracement of diversity.

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