

# CEO's Who Get It!: Diversity Leadership from the Heart and Soul

*By Mary-Frances Winters*



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The Winters Group partnered with Diversity Best Practices to write a book, *CEO's Who Get It: Diversity Leadership from the Heart and Soul*. Twenty titans of industry were interviewed in the summer of 2006, including the CEO's of Cummins, Deloitte & Touche USA LLP, Hewitt Associates, Johnson Controls, Kaiser Permanente, The Eastman Kodak Company, Major League Baseball, Merrill Lynch, MGM Mirage, Monster, Motorola, Procter & Gamble, Progress Energy, Sears Holdings Corporation, Sodexo, The Calvert Group, Time Warner, Wachovia, Wal-Mart Stores, Inc and Weyerhaeuser.

Together the 20 leaders interviewed amass almost \$1 trillion in revenue and employ more than 3 million people. They are some of the most powerful people in the world, shaping our future with breakthrough technologies, innovative retailing strategies and state-of-the-art investment models.

And without exception, each recognizes diversity as a key driver of business success and consequently they have intentionally evolved into outstanding stewards of diversity.

Popular management theorists suggest that great leaders are, in essence, "stewards." A powerful concept, it aptly describes how CEO's Who Get It lead. From a literal definition, stewards oversee or take care of something or someone. They do not delegate, relegate, or abdicate their stewardship role, deeming it an honor to be of service. Operating at a higher level than accountability, stewardship exudes humility, compassion, and appreciation.

As Stewards for these CEO's diversity is not separate from the business but rather it is a key business driver and, as such, is mainstreamed throughout the organization's policies and practices. Motorola's Ed Zander maybe put it best: "Business and diversity don't just go hand in hand, they are one in the same. Business means diversity, and diversity means business." At every meeting he addresses three topics: ethics, quality, and diversity. For some, optimizing and leveraging diversity among employees and customers is the key driver. Take A.G. Lafley who is using diversity to drive innovation at Procter & Gamble.

These leaders consistently define diversity as leveraging all talent in pursuit of business success. According to A.G. Lafley, "A group of diverse people with different backgrounds, experiences and leadership styles will out-think, out-innovate and out-execute a homogeneous group of people anytime".

Each of these CEO's consistently exhibit values and behaviors that demonstrate their diversity stewardship. They include:

**Unequivocal:** Unwavering, unrelenting, absolute, unambiguous, steadfast, and dogged, all describe the CEOs Who Get It when it comes to their commitment to diversity. The Calvert Group's Barbara Krumsiek exemplifies a leader who fights gender equity issues in very innovative ways. Deloitte's Barry Salzberg is very visible both internally and externally speaking passionately about the importance of diversity. George Halvorson, Kaiser Permanente's CEO made radical changes in the demographic makeup of his senior team very quickly after assuming the top job. Monster's Bill Pastore said he has a reputation for being tough, blunt, and blatant when it comes to diversity.

CEOs Who Get It tackle the tough issues, don't back down, and are willing to take a stand, even when controversial. Wachovia's Ken Thompson took a strong stand for the Boy Scouts even though his LGBT affinity group disagreed with his position. Bud Selig, Major League Baseball,

and Wal-Mart's Lee Scott have both confronted their share of public and controversial diversity issues with courage and resolve.

**Patiently Impatient:** This quality has also been described in leadership lingo as "leading with a sense of urgency." CEOs Who Get It acknowledged that the road to full inclusion is long and hard, but each demonstrates a sense of urgency and little tolerance for those who don't get it and don't want to get it. Cummins Tim Solso declared that he lost his patience with those who don't want to get it a long time ago.

**Comfortable with Complexity and Ambiguity:** CEOs Who Get It understand that diversity is a complex and multifaceted topic Eastman Kodak's Antonio Perez, who was born and has lived extensively outside the U.S., agreed that understanding different cultures is one of the most difficult things to learn and takes much study and experience. Yet, all of these CEOs, while not claiming proficiency, navigate well in the murky waters of diversity and cross-culturalism.

**A "Seventh Sense:"** CEOs Who Get It possess an uncanny ability to see the whole in relation to the parts. We often talk about putting on a diversity lens, but for these leaders it is more than a mere lens that magnifies the image; it is a kaleidoscope, where the patterns are continually shifting but these leaders are able to keep the whole in view. It is the quality that allows comfort with ambiguity and complexity and a sense of "patient" impatience. It also enables them to see patterns, relationships and synergies and anticipate the future. Barbara Krumsiek is a master at seeing "wholes" and making new connections.

**Humble:** Despite their impressive records, characteristic of stewards, each CEO displayed genuine modesty about his/her diversity accomplishments, not wanting to be portrayed as having "arrived" at some ultimate diversity destination.

Bob McGehee, Progress Energy, doesn't know if anyone of his generation really "gets it" and vowed that he will be working on "it" forever and Ken Thompson specifically cautioned me not to cast him as "getting it." Similarly, Hewitt's Dale Gifford (now retired) was reluctant to be pegged as an expert.

Demonstrating humility in the trenches, Terry Lanni admitted to his critics that MGM MIRAGE needed to improve its diversity profile, and after having done so very successfully in four short years, he publicly thanked the same critics for bringing the issue to the forefront. Acknowledging it as a humbling experience, Lee Scott insists that his team candidly tell him when he has made a diversity faux pas.

**On the Front Lines not the Sidelines:** Management gurus promote the concept of "managing by walking around." CEOs Who Get It take that idea several steps further. They manage by "talking around," "listening around," "inquiring around" and "hanging around." As attentive stewards, they coach, mentor, advise, and nurturer.

Barry Salzberg is also a standout mentor and coach, with a current cadre of about 10 to 15 protégés. As a good steward, Merrill Lynch's Ahmass Fakahany sees it as his personal duty and privilege to mentor and coach others. Procter & Gamble's AG Lafley, teaches a portion of every leadership development program and promotes the importance of diversity to achieve P&G's main goal of innovation.

**Fluency and Fluidity:** We expect leaders to rattle off business strategy, earnings goals and the like but it is a rare CEO, we think, who can be just as comfortable talking in depth about

diversity. Without exception the CEOs Who Get It spoke fluently and fluidly, from the heart, about their conviction. They had compelling and poignant stories and clearly saw the connection to the success of the business.

Weyerhaeuser's Steve Rogel recalled some painful days in Mississippi in the mid-60s that made an indelible mark on his sensibilities about fairness; Barbara Krumsiek shared her experiences as a young woman growing up pre-Civil Rights that drive her penchant for women's rights; Johnson Control's John Barth talked about his two decade, award-winning work in supplier diversity and the difference it has made in the quality of the vendors they partner with; George Halvorson spoke about his unpublished book on diversity, written over two decades, and based on travels to several countries that has helped him to understand diversity and conflict.

CEO's Who Get It special magic lies in their ability to lead mammoth global enterprises while at the same time being prodigious stewards of diversity not only because it is the right thing to do but because they understand that diversity as a key driver of business success.



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