

Organizational Advisor

Issue Number 9

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Diversity means more than just numbers

Ask managers if their work force is diverse, and they'll usually respond by discussing statistics. They may share with you how many women and minorities are in management roles and may even tell you that these individuals have a "seat at the table."

But numbers alone don't tell the story. Diversity is no longer just about race and gender. It's about providing a climate in which all employees, regardless of background and beliefs, know their contributions are valued. It also now encompasses vendors, suppliers and business partners. Embracing differences and inclusiveness is the name of the game. So even if your statistics are good, a diversity program makes business sense. And if your numbers aren't good, a program is essential to your company's continued success.

Staying competitive

A full 85% of new entrants into the workplace are women, immigrants and people of color. The demographics have changed in recent years, and companies must adapt if they hope to attract and retain a qualified work force.

Let's say your business is profitable and your turnover is manageable. Why spend time and resources on a diversity program when everything is going so well? It's simple: If you want to compete in a diverse global economy, you must change. If you don't, how will your organization:

- 👤 Effectively manage a work force that comes from numerous ethnic backgrounds, age groups, nationalities and lifestyles?
- 👤 Attract highly skilled employees as the working population decreases?
- 👤 Satisfy the needs of increasing numbers of dual-career families and single-parent households who need work-life balance?

- 👤 Market to growing multicultural markets who don't necessarily respond to the marketing strategies you currently use?

Implementing a diversity program is an investment, not an expense. If your work environment welcomes all, you'll be in a much stronger position to compete for talent and business.

Starting the process

Achieving diversity is a journey that may lead to other discoveries along the way. Treat your diversity initiative as a cultural change and recognize that, like anything worthwhile, results take time. Here are some tips to get you started:

Search inside. Begin by looking around your company. Make good use of managers who have successfully implemented diversity programs at previous employers. If they're qualified, tap them to start up a new program for you. (Make sure they have enough time for this initiative, without negatively affecting their current responsibilities.) If you lack in-house expertise or need help jumpstarting your program, consider external resources.



Gain executive support. Successful business initiatives begin with management support. Senior management must be committed to your program — but don't expect this to

happen by itself. Start by educating your executives about why diversity makes sense and the impact this program will have on your organization.

Formalize your plan. Develop diversity goals that support your business plan, and continually measure your company's progress. (See "Diversity Program 101.") And, while you are at it, don't forget to link these goals to your compensation plan.

Committing to diversity

Customers or clients that are committed to their diversity efforts will often do business only with companies that espouse the same level of obligation. But it's not enough to tell them you're committed to diversity or even show them statistics. More than likely, these companies will ask to see your program.

Get started now and you may very well find that your diversity efforts have led you on an even more successful business path. Please call us to help you make it happen. 🧑🏿🧑🏻

Diversity Program 101

So you realize your present diversity program needs work. Or, worse, you don't have a diversity program. No cause for alarm; here are a few ways to improve your current program or institute one:

- Develop a business plan that links diversity efforts to your overall business. Include metrics to measure your accomplishments. For example, in your business plan, state the percentage of your vendor dollars that you will spend with minority or women-owned vendors.
- Manage diversity as you would any other critical business objective. For instance, promote or hire a VP of diversity to lead this charge.
- Value the differences in your organization, such as the unique perspectives of diverse groups.
- Add an educational element to your plan. Train managers at all company levels about how to hire and retain a diverse work force.
- Establish a mentoring program to help minority employees understand the corporate culture and how to move through it.

Remember: Diversity isn't just a program. It's a way of life. So continue your efforts through good times and bad.

Don't try to wing it

Avoid flaps with uniform HR policies

Mr. Ostrich was baffled. In his five years as owner of Howe & Wie Consultants, he always guessed at the answers to employee benefit queries.

And, so far, so good — until now. Ostrich inadvertently gave two employees conflicting answers to the same question, and now they both want to meet with him to get a definitive answer. Unfortunately, he doesn't have one.

Scenarios like this play out every day in organizations that don't have formalized human resource policies. A well-written, comprehensive employee handbook can help your company avoid Ostrich's discomfort. In fact, if done right, a handbook can do even more.

Protection from ruffled feathers

Ostrich was fortunate. His co-workers' question didn't have legal ramifications. But let's not kid ourselves. One of the main reasons companies invest in employee handbooks is protection from lawsuits. In today's litigious environment, it's best to prepare for the worst. Clearly written HR policies strengthen your company's defense if a worker sues. Don't wait to test this theory until an employer-employee relationship heads south.

Look at it another way: A manager without an employee handbook is a lot like a coach without a rulebook. You can't expect your managers or team members to play by the rules if they don't know what they are. Comprehensive employee handbooks ensure that everyone knows the rules of the game before they go onto the field.

Honking your company's horn

More than just rules and regulations, employee handbooks can communicate the benefits of working for your firm. Employees sometimes don't appreciate everything their company offers them. Perhaps that's because they — and maybe even their managers — don't know about them.



You needn't go into minutiae about all of your benefit plans, but it never hurts to remind employees that you care about their welfare. Benefits to highlight include maternity leave, summer hours and the organization's contribution to the employer-sponsored health and dental plans.

Each flock is unique

One word of caution: When it comes to employee handbooks, one size definitely doesn't fit all. Think twice before making a few changes to an associate's "borrowed" handbook and calling it your own. The handbook's tone may be appropriate for a transportation company, for instance, but be unsuitable for yours. Also, keep in mind the questionable integrity of a "borrowed" document. Chances are, you'll have no idea who originally wrote the handbook let alone if it's in compliance.

The same applies to downloading handbooks from the Internet. Yes, the handbook may be fine for, let's say, a California-based company, but may be inappropriate for

The top 10 reasons you don't need an employee handbook

10. You like testing your memory.
9. You prefer continual face-to-face interaction with your personnel, particularly when rushing to an important client meeting.
8. Your expectations of personnel change daily, so your HR policies should too.
7. You believe that the less employees know, the more committed they'll be to the company.
6. You think the status quo is fantastic, so no need to rock the boat.
5. You envision handbooks for larger companies only; smaller companies can wing it.
4. You enjoy the thrill of dodging bullets.
3. You encourage employees to do their own thing because it makes your workplace seem creative.
2. Your employees may complain because a handbook is "way too corporate."
1. Your company is immune from all employee lawsuits.

multistate employers. Distributing a document that doesn't apply to the state(s) in which you operate can translate into an administrative — or worse, legal — nightmare for you.

Don't fly solo

More than likely, you've worked in an organization that didn't have an employee handbook. In fact, as an owner or manager, you may have felt relieved to escape its whiff of bureaucracy. That was until someone approached you with a company-policy question that you couldn't answer. Please call today; we can help you create a tool that can benefit your company. 🧑🏻‍🤝‍🧑🏻

Respect your elders

Integrating seasoned workers into your work force

Is your work force beginning to look like a Gap ad? Do you hesitate when you interview a more mature worker because you're not sure how he or she will fit into your corporate culture? Don't pass on another seasoned candidate — and not just because age discrimination is illegal. The fact is, more seasoned workers (age 40+) can enhance your work force, so look at ways to integrate them into your organization.

Experience = assets

Gone are the dot-com days when a management team's average age seemed to hover around 21. With the rise in unemployment, more highly experienced workers are available. In fact, your company's composition may be changing right before your eyes.



Let your employees know why you're adding bench strength to your organization and how this will benefit them.

Seasoned workers offer you myriad benefits. For starters, they were around during the last economic slowdown, so the word “budget” tends to resonate more with them. In addition, they're usually well-connected in their fields and can assemble talented teams quickly. Seasoned workers also tend to be self-motivated and require little supervision.

Effort = reward

Adding mature workers into a work force that has been predominantly young can be a scary proposition. But there are ways to ease the transition:

Keep everyone informed. No one likes being in the dark. Let your employees know why you're adding bench strength to your organization and how this will benefit them. And, while you're at it, acknowledge the current employees who have worked hard to build your organization. Reassure them that their contributions will continue to be valued.

Involve other employees. When appropriate, involve your employees in the hiring process. If co-workers help make hiring decisions, you will experience less resistance. (Proper interviewing techniques are essential to avoid potential legal problems, so be sure your designated interviewers are up-to-date on correct interview procedures.)

Institute a mentoring program. When you bring in new employees, it's an opportune time to institute a mentoring program — if one isn't already in place. Pair up new seasoned workers with more junior level ones who have been with your organization awhile and watch both groups learn

from each other. Formalize your program so employees know you support this venture.

Offer management training. To make your inter-generational work team effective, offer management training to employees, supervising those who may be twice as experienced. Leading with respect and tactfulness comes from feeling confident. An effective management-training program or one-on-one personal coaching can help your employees gain the self-assurance they need to be effective leaders.

Teamwork = success

There's plenty of ripe talent out there just waiting to be picked. Now that you have a recipe for adding this group to your mix, why not get started now? And if you need help combining your organization's various ingredients, please give us a call. 🧑🏻‍🤝‍🧑🏻



Make raises pay off: Treat employees fairly, not equally

Imagine a company where everyone did as little as possible. Externally, the company's reputation would suffer, customers would abandon it in droves, and its bottom line would sag. Internally, employee morale would plummet. But that's what you could get if exceptional employees receive the same increases as mediocre ones.

You're telling them that work performance doesn't directly affect salary increases so they needn't bother to work hard because they'll receive the same raise as someone who goofed off. It's demoralizing to your star performers to receive the

same raise as those less stellar. Certainly, it's simpler to congratulate everyone for a job well-done and give equal pay raises across the board than it is to point out subpar performance to some employees and give them lower raises. But, short-term pain can equal long-term gain.

Theoretically, no one knows anyone else's salary information. Realistically, some co-workers discuss money — moreso if they're unhappy. And the buzz gets louder around review time as workers compare notes. You may think there will be no repercussions because you treated everyone equally. Equal, however, isn't always fair.

Instead, you should expect varying performance levels and judge employees accordingly. Coach your managers about employee evaluations and don't hesitate to reward your stars. Also, don't fear that people might leave because they don't get the pay raises they expect. If mediocre employees leave, you have the opportunity to replace them with potential stars. Send the right message to your work force, and the cream will rise to the top.



Ask the Advisor

Perks alone aren't worth beans

Dear Advisor:

I am the Director of Administration for a service firm that employs 65 people. I'm responsible for hiring and managing the professional and nonprofessional support staff.

You'd think in this economy that turnover wouldn't be a problem. But for some reason, it is at our firm. I understand that some turnover is good, but lately it seems like we've installed a revolving door.



I've done everything I can think of to make people feel good at work. For example, employees celebrating their fifth anniversary with the company can choose from a lovely assortment of diamond jewelry or weekend getaways. I have lunch brought in regularly, and we give our staff movie tickets for exceptional performance. If employees have to work late, we send them home with a family meal, prepared by our on-site chef. I thought we were doing all the right things until I brought someone in to do an employee survey. The results floored me.

Yes, a few employees mentioned the perks, but they seemed to focus on the negatives! The main gripe was late performance reviews. Apparently, several employees still have not received performance reviews that were due four months ago. I'm disappointed that employees don't seem to value the extras we provide. Is there any hope of turning this situation around, or am I fighting a losing battle here?

Signed,
Ready to throw in the towel

Dear Ready:

Don't give up just yet. I know the survey results weren't quite what you had anticipated, but try looking at the bright side. You professionally surveyed your employees — kudos for that. You now have a more realistic sense of what is — and isn't — working in your company. Now you can take steps to enhance areas that will directly improve your workplace.

You can have the most beautiful offices and the best benefits, but that means little if employees feel undervalued. Late performance reviews, for instance, clearly signal employees that assessing their effectiveness isn't a priority. Feelings will heat to the boiling point if compensation links to the review.

Think about it: Most employees work hard to please their employer in the hope that, at some point, they'll be recognized for their efforts. And that generally occurs at review time. If your management team can't complete this task on schedule, perhaps it's time to look at your performance management system. Ask some simple questions, such as:

1. On average, how long does it take a manager to complete the review process?
2. How many approvals are required before management considers the review completed?
3. Has your organization trained managers about how to use your system?
4. What are the consequences when a manager doesn't deliver a review on time?

Your employees are telling you they want acknowledgment. Perks are great, but perhaps it's time to revamp your performance management system. Start training your management team on the system and explain what your employees value and what they don't. As you've seen, sometimes their answers will surprise you.

From the CEO's Chair Executive Coaching – A Case Study

Executive coaching is a powerful tool for change when the organization positions coaching effectively, the executive to be coached desires change and is also capable of making necessary changes. Executive coaching is designed to address many performance related scenarios including organizational or strategic issues, personal development, or leadership effectiveness. Key to successful change is an effective process, a focus on results, and accountability. The return on investment can be substantial and far exceed expectations or return on other development alternatives. Following is a typical performance improvement executive coaching case as an example of a remarkable turn around.

Situation

Recently, a national law firm asked us to work with one of its shareholders, who I will call Jim. The firm wanted to retain Jim, but could not continue to tolerate his behavioral problems, which were affecting productivity in the organization.

Solution

After speaking with the Managing Partner, we suggested he meet with Jim, lay out his concerns and tell him that they wanted him to meet with an executive coach. In this case Jim was very receptive and wanted to do what was right for himself and the firm. It is not unusual for executives to experience frustration with the same issues that the organization does, although they may not understand how or why they are creating problems.

Very quickly, Jim and the executive coach established a trust relationship that allowed them to deal with a variety of issues, conduct an assessment and establish a plan for behavioral, performance and personal goals. Building on Jim's strengths, the plan provided new insights and tools he needed to meet the demands of his job and family while also establishing accountability. He developed a healthy support system and created strong relationships with his team and associates. The coach and executive worked together for 8 months to reinforce new behaviors.

The Managing Director recently told us that the problem was solved and that he would take action sooner to address a situation of this nature in the future. Jim says he is much happier, more productive and that his relationships at work and at home have improved significantly. He also

Benefits of Executive Coaching

This case is exemplary of the common process and results in many executive coaching situations. The results typically include:

- Retention of the professional and institutional knowledge and skills
- Elimination or containment of unproductive behavior
- Increased results in key performances areas
- Avoidance of lost performance, opportunity and replacement costs.

reports that his revenue generation increased significantly after the coaching.

Dawson & Dawson Consultants' team of Synergistic Executive Coaching professionals collaborate on a wide range of similar coaching opportunities that enable our clients to achieve organizational synergy. During periods of change involving leadership, career development, succession planning, and strategic shifts, organizations can reap significant rewards from executive coaching. In particular, coaching that facilitates running the rapids of performance challenges while addressing the needs of both the executive and the organization leads to increased synergy. For organizations in transition, the Dawson & Dawson Synergistic Coaching approach produces benefits in which the sum is significantly greater than the parts — a proven equation for increased bottom line results.

*Sheryl N. Dawson, CEO
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