



HOW DO YOU RECRUIT FOR DIVERSITY?

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One of our clients recently called with a common question — how do you recruit and hire for diversity, especially when you can't disclose the race, ethnicity and gender of candidates? Finding, attracting and hiring a more diverse group of professionals isn't easy. If it was, it would have been done years ago in organizations across the country. However, there are steps you can take to increase success in achieving this goal by focusing on four arenas.

1. THE POOL

If your current pool is pretty homogeneous, one area to address is to increase the diversity in the arena you are drawing from. That means broaden outreach, go to a wider range of schools and organizations. Tap professional associations whose members are of different backgrounds from your current workforce, for example, the National Society of Hispanic MBAs or the National Black MBA Association. Expand beyond the Ivy league colleges where you currently recruit and network with colleagues who can connect you with new and different groups of professionals. Many organizations also develop a pipeline by bringing in interns and working with local high schools to engage students in the appropriate fields.

2. YOUR EXISTING WORKFORCE

Employees frequently complain that recruitment focuses on bringing people in from outside and overlooks diverse staff in the organization. What are you doing about identifying and developing the talent of individuals at lower levels in the organization who could broaden the makeup of leadership? There may be sources there that are untapped.

Another area to focus on internally is retention. Identify the barriers that women and people of color face that may be a factor in their leaving for greener pastures. Look at exit interview data and conduct focus groups to identify the obstacles that prevent them from staying. Finally, if your organization has employee resource groups, tap their knowledge and experience for ideas about how to recruit more employees of their identity groups.

3. THE CULTURE OF THE ORGANIZATION

It is pointless to recruit a diverse workforce and then not leverage the differences they bring. How open is your culture to different ideas and ways of doing things?

Without an inclusive culture that truly appreciates and values differences you are not apt to attract or retain a wider range of people. Take a look at the practices in your organization. Are people rejected or not fully included because they are not a “fit?” Do you currently hold leaders accountable for considering a diverse slate before making a hiring or promotion decision? Are hiring panels diverse and is there an expectation that all committees and task forces will have a diverse make up? If you have a higher rate of turnover of staff of underrepresented groups, have you investigated to find out why? Answers to these questions can lead you to develop strategies to create greater inclusion in the culture.

4. MINDSETS

There are a few ways of thinking that discourage the recruitment of more diversity and these need to be addressed as well. First, is the assumption that “they aren’t out there.” This is self-defeating and pessimistic view influences you to give up before you start. Finding diverse candidates may be more challenging, but there are potential employees of the groups you are seeking. The question is where and how to reach them. Second is the assumption that “we have to lower our standards” to hire people who would diversify our ranks. This presupposes that diversity and quality are opposite ends of a continuum and getting more of one means giving up some of the other. A more productive way to look at this is to see diversity and quality as independent variables. You want candidates that bring both. This means writing job descriptions that include skills and experiences that diverse candidates would bring such as:

- Works effectively with a wide range of cultures
- Relates well to students/staff/customers of all backgrounds
- Has experience working in many communities

Finally, engaging hiring managers in making the strategic business case for recruiting and retaining diverse staff is essential. If those in position to hire, coach and develop people see the value both to themselves and to the organization in doing so, they will be more committed to the extra time and energy the process requires.

As you can see, recruiting a more diverse workforce takes forethought, planning and work. However, paying attention to these four areas of focus can up your chances for success.

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