



MASTERING
CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

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Success Strategies for Recruiting a Diverse Workforce

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Develop a comprehensive plan. Your organization should develop a strategic plan that identifies the goals to be achieved related to diversity. Ideally, the plan should be institutionalized and everyone in the organization needs to consider it their top priority. When developing the plan, seek input from individuals at all levels of the organization. It is also imperative that, from its inception, the leadership publicly show support for the plan and make its implementation a priority. A clearly defined and focused strategy can help your organization improve its bottom line, attract top talent, and retain high-potential employees.

2

Dispel the notion that there aren't enough qualified candidates. This is often known as the "deficit model of recruiting." According to the model, there just aren't enough qualified diverse candidates, and those few who might be qualified won't come to your organization. If they do come, they won't stay long because they will soon leave for another company. Contrary to this belief, the reality is that many individuals of color or any other diverse individuals will indeed consider your organization if their qualifications are seriously considered and if they feel welcomed and supported.

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Make sure your job announcements are crafted in a way that attracts diversity. Job announcements can be the single most effective tool in recruiting anyone, especially qualified, diverse applicants. However, in order for diverse applicants to become interested in your organization, they must find something in it that sets it apart from any other organization they might be considering. Start by stating that a candidate's commitment to and experience with diversity and inclusion is one of the requirements for the job. This often leads to diverse candidates researching the position and the organization. They also start entertaining the idea that this may actually be a place where they can come in, fully use their skills, and be themselves.



4

Stop looking for individuals to “fit” into your organization. You are not looking for a buddy to hang out with. Hiring for culture fit inevitably gets in the way of increasing diversity in the organization. You should look, instead, for “culture add” in candidates if your goal is to increase workplace diversity. This allows you to bring candidates in to help shape the culture of your organization, rather than fit into it.

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Make sure search committees are properly trained to bring diversity in. You can enhance your search process by holding training focusing on topics such as the importance of valuing diversity, developing cultural competence skills, and understanding the impact of unconscious bias in candidate selection. You can also ensure that every search committee has a “diversity advocate” who is empowered to promote and keep diversity goals at the forefront during the search. I have served in this role in many searches. In that capacity, one of my responsibilities was to ensure every aspect of the search was conducted with diversity in mind and that we were not inadvertently keeping diversity out. In one search, for example, I suggested we changed the question “Did the candidate speak clearly and concisely?” to “Did the candidate make his/her point across?” The former refers to a style preferred by direct communicators. Had we kept that question in the screening process, we would have penalized those candidates who also made their point across but did it in a more indirect manner, for example, by telling a story first.

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Highlight your organization’s diversity growth and reward its successes. Your organization needs to take every opportunity to talk about its successes with diversity—even if progress in increasing diversity has not been as great as desired. This helps you make clear to potential candidates that diversity is indeed valued and that you are continuing to make strides. Departments and units that achieve goals or milestones related to diversity should be recognized. Their success stories should be shared because their strategies may be of assistance to other departments. You can heighten the importance of diversity within the organization by making sure individuals of diverse backgrounds are routinely portrayed and their achievements recognized – especially in the organization’s marketing materials. Also, consider implementing a *Diversity Achievement Award* based on nominations from staff and supervisors to recognize significant contributions in this area.

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Brief potential candidates on what the organization and the community have to offer. This is a strategy that is often ignored. This is important because candidates are not only deciding to work for your organization, but they are also deciding if they want to make a life for themselves (and possibly their families) in a new community. A person who is relocating and has the full support of their family is more likely to have a healthier stay in your organization. You should inform your candidates about what it is like to live in the community and highlight what it has to offer. For example, in the relocation training I developed for a family moving from Brazil to Utah, I provided them with information such as local schools, churches, hospitals, restaurants, recreational activities, quality of education their children would have, and the level of health care available in the community. Also, consider establishing networking and support groups for all new employees. This is different than providing certain types of services for employees of color exclusively, which might, unintentionally, lead to feelings of marginalization or a sense they are less qualified or need greater support or assistance. When I relocated to the Twin Cities area, the institution hiring me assigned me my own “navigator.” In fact, all new employees were assigned one. This individual became my go-to person whenever I had questions regarding the job, the institution, or the community.

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Assessment is key. Without assessing your recruitment efforts, you will be unable to measure their effectiveness. Focusing solely on how you are reaching your numerical benchmarks, though, is not enough. You also need to look at how individuals are experiencing the organization; if they leave, you need to know why. Conducting a climate assessment is a significant step toward understanding how truly inclusive your organization is and ensuring a workplace where all individuals feel welcome, that they belong, and can fully use their talents towards contributing to the success of the organization. Exit interviews are also important. They can help you understand the reasons for your employees’ departure, if it is climate related, as well as if they took advantage of any retention services or programs that exist. This is important considering that the cost of hiring a new employee is typically 20% or more of that employee’s annual salary. A thorough examination of your recruitment practices as well as your retention efforts will help you look at what you are doing, gain a deeper understanding of why it is not working, and then develop more targeted solutions. For example, if you identify that certain departments have a hard time retaining minority employees, this allows you to focus your efforts on those departments.

