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# The Positive Aspects Of Diversity Hiring

Written by Bill Humbert and Cyndy Trivella

## **The Positive Aspects Of Diversity Hiring**

The hiring world has changed. Now is the time to focus on the positive aspects of diversity hiring instead of the punitive, negative minefields created when diversity was legislated. The practice of diversity hiring begins as an attitude first – accepting that people who look different, have different ideas, experiences, and knowledge may contribute in a positive manner to any organization.

Generally, once a company begins to have success hiring employees with different backgrounds and genders, diversity hiring becomes ingrained in the company culture. The move from the decision to be more inclusive as a company to actually hire diverse candidates requires attention to details that a company may have glossed over in the past.

For instance, a company needs to focus on selecting the right skills, experience and fit. They need to create a strategy to attract a diverse, passive, top-performing candidate to a company that may be only one race and gender. This motivation must be reciprocal. If a company decides to hire candidates who look and think differently, it should not be assumed these candidates will be interested in these job postings.

It can be very tough to be the first person to join a company where all the other employees look, think and act differently. Therefore, once a company decides to include people from other backgrounds to benefit the organization, there are details that need to be realized. This would be a good time to review the company's entire recruiting process and improve areas that may have fallen into neglect.<sup>1</sup>

### **Reasons To Hire Diversity Candidates**

Imagine your company's business challenges. It may be how to penetrate a new market, how to update a winning product that has begun to age, or even making the decision whether or not to use Agile process improvement to increase the bottom line. Now examine the make-up of the team trying to solve the problem or create a new strategy. If everyone thinks alike based on their experience and perspective, who will challenge proposed solutions or ask questions to ferret out possible unintended consequences.<sup>2</sup>

### **Geographic Realities And Challenges**

Every location in the United States has pockets with a different mix of people. Some areas are very homogeneous – seemingly almost everyone looks and sounds alike (i.e., Provo, UT). Other

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<sup>1</sup> *Diversity and The Workplace*, Judith Lindenberger

[https://www.experience.com/alumnus/article?channel\\_id=diversity&source\\_page=additional\\_articles&article\\_id=article\\_1134069577860](https://www.experience.com/alumnus/article?channel_id=diversity&source_page=additional_articles&article_id=article_1134069577860)

<sup>2</sup> *Diversity and Work Group Performance*, Stanford School of Business Staff

<https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/insights/diversity-work-group-performance>

areas are very diverse because of their nature – Washington, DC (world capitol that draws people from around the globe and across the U.S.), New York City and San Francisco (glamorous port cities that attract different groups of people), Miami and Los Angeles (cities that draw people from South America and from across the U.S).

In reality, some companies are uncomfortable attracting candidates that don't look nor "sound like us." After all, "we want our team to be comfortable and work well together." It doesn't matter whether the company foundation is Hispanic, African American, Asian Pacific, Caucasian, Male, Female, Christian, Jewish, Muslim (or any other religion), under 30 years old, over 60 years old. Generally, as humans, we like associating with people with whom we are comfortable. It is our nature.

Let's return to the aforementioned business challenge. If everyone looking at the problem is from the same area, same race, male, under 30, and same religion, they will all look at the problem from a similar direction with a high probability of concluding the same solution. Adding just one variance, women for example, with the balance of the conditions remaining the same, brings a different angle to look at the solution or strategy – still peering from the same perspective.

Now let's consider a diverse group of people looking at our problem or potential strategy. Based on their life experience, each person will look at our problem from their life perspective and work experience – therefore from different angles on all sides of the equation.<sup>3</sup>

By contrast, the homogeneous group will create a solution based on their collective and common point of view and experience. Whereas, the diverse group will bring different experiences, perspectives and possibly variations to the solution.

### **On The Other Hand, It Can Be Against Our Law**

Remember, we all have our biases based on our experiences. Engaging employees with diverse backgrounds will teach companies new ways to approach and solve problems. Maslow postulated a hierarchy of needs that satisfies the motivation of people to seek satisfaction. One level in the hierarchy states that a sense of belonging and unity is needed by all people. This unity includes a sense of "group" applicable to a workplace environment. It is here where people seek out new relationships which can include interactions with people different from ourselves.

People such as **George Washington Carver**, who introduced crop rotation in the south<sup>4</sup> and **Charles Drew**, who created a system for storing blood plasma (blood bank), which revolutionized the medical profession<sup>5</sup> were contributors at a time when discrimination was driven by racial bias. The discrimination they faced, undoubtedly, stagnated their progress but it

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<sup>3</sup> *Diversity's Positive Impact in the Workplace*, Lynne D Johnson, FASTCOMPANY, <http://www.fastcompany.com/676339/diversitys-positive-impact-workplace>

<sup>4</sup> <http://inventors.about.com/library/inventors/blfarm.htm#rotation>

<sup>5</sup> <http://inventors.about.com/od/famousinventors/fl/Charles-Drew-Inventor-of-the-Blood-Bank.htm>

didn't hamper their pursuit to create solutions to benefit humankind. They, and others like them, demonstrate the power of diversity in thinking and innovation at its best.

### **Implementing/Improving Recruiting To Become More Inclusive**

Unfortunately, recruiting is littered with minefields. In March 2016, an email was sent to a Boston listserv of recruiters from a job posting in New England - "*Please note this environment is VERY GREEN, someone with 10+ years of experience will NOT be a culture fit here*". This is the type of job posting that could get a company in trouble with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

In the United States, the following groups or conditions are protected: Age, Gender/Gender Identity, Marital Status, Disability, Military/Veteran Status, Pregnancy, National Origin, Citizenship, Race, Religion or Creed --- essentially everyone.

Now is the time to examine the *Recruiting Is Sales* process in order to improve your company's potential to attract top diverse candidates. Success recruiting diversity candidates requires a thorough understanding of the context in the recruiting process. Ultimately, improving a company's recruiting process improves all recruiting results, including diversity recruiting. Once a recruiting strategy is defined and refined, attracting diversity top performers becomes part of a company's culture and the employment value proposition.

Consider how the recruiting process mirrors the sales process.

#### **Sales Process.....**

**Identify Need.....**

**Create Solution.....**

**Source Potential Clients.....**

**Needs Analysis.....**

**Proposal.....**

**Due Diligence.....**

**Cost Negotiation.....**

**Close.....**

**Delivery of Product.....**

**Product Training.....**

**Retaining Clients.....**

#### **Recruiting Process**

**New/Replacement Position**

**Job Description**

**Source Candidates**

**Interview/Selection**

**Candidate Offer**

**References & Checking**

**Compensation Negotiation**

**Close Candidate**

**Candidate Start Date**

**Candidate Onboarding**

**Retaining Employees**

## **The Illusive Job Description**

Attracting top, diverse candidates requires a welcoming environment for them, especially if they are the early adopters entering your company. Importantly, your job description needs to be on target so they do not experience surprises during their interviews (“That’s not part of the job anymore!”). Once one questionable action is brought to the surface, the candidate begins to ask themselves if other questionable practices exist.

As a company determines that it needs a new or replacement employee, it is common practice to simply take the previous job description to source for new talent. Unfortunately, that practice rarely finds the best possible candidate, and may or may not intentionally discriminate against certain protected groups.

Over time the nature of jobs changes, even on a manufacturing line. However, many companies continue the practice of using the same job description repeatedly. This behavior can lessen the likelihood of some people in the population applying, because they do not seek out these jobs due to the worn-out description. Another possibility is they may not be aware of the opportunities due to where and how the job posting is presented. The reasons companies continue to use the same job descriptions vary, but regardless of the reason, job descriptions need to be updated to be inclusive.

Any job description that is several years old may not reflect the changes made to the job as the result of new software and technology, new markets and products or simply a refined business process. If the goals do not match the skills and experience required to be successful the first year, the manager and company will be less successful because they are hiring the wrong candidates. The goals to update may help uncover any conscious or unconscious bias towards or against any group of people.

These changes in the job bring opportunities to introduce new people with new experiences (both life and technology or process improvement) to the company. The introduction of new people broaches an opportunity to ask new questions and provide new approaches to problems that may not have been considered previously.

If your company’s job description is on target, there is a better chance that candidate sourcing will be on target. If your company’s job description is well-written and inclusive, there is a better chance to increase the candidate pool by reaching a larger swatch of the population. Poorly written job descriptions shrink the talent pool and in doing so eliminates some people within the population that do not match the expectations of the description. Then the interview process is faulted for selecting the wrong candidates.

Sourcing diversity candidates requires skill, particularly if the company employees all look alike in their backgrounds and experience. Many companies are satisfied with posting jobs on the Internet and praying for the right candidates to respond. Unfortunately, by definition, the passive candidate who needs to be recruited is not surfing those job boards. Of course a company may place a job posting on a diversity job board in the hopes that the right candidate may be grazing there at the same time the company is. Occasionally they are. Unfortunately, rarely do searches

for the best and brightest occur at the same time that the candidate is searching for a new opportunity.

There should be no stylistic differences interviewing diversity candidates than interviewing candidates the company has hired in the past. Actually, doing a better job assessing the requirements of each job, benefits the company by hiring the best possible performer, diversity or otherwise.

A successful example of diversity hiring is when the founder of a global telecommunications giant, understood the importance of inclusiveness and bringing together a diverse workforce to solve problems and create new opportunities. As a result of his leadership, a large telecom monopoly was dismantled. This founder's company used its creative minds to bring consumers an unmatched long distance product to compete against other telecom companies. Later, those same minds created a truly disruptive collect-calling product that forced its competition to create a product that mistakenly ran on this founder's company network. The innovation that arose from the creative minds of the founder's employees were nimble and disrupted an industry where their technology and marketing lowered the cost of long-distance calling for consumers.

As this innovative founder demonstrated, if a company is interested in becoming a disruptive force in its industry, hiring a diverse workforce is key. The rewards for this success garnered high-producing results.

## **The Tools**

Companies tend to use their favorite tools to source candidates. If they are searching for the best diversity candidates for the first time, they may not know where to find the best. There are many creative ways:

- 1) Send your managers to conferences where diversity candidates may attend. Send a seasoned corporate recruiter with them to coach on the approach.
- 2) Go to the colleges/universities where your company has success attracting new recruits. Offer to present at the department in the college where they are majoring.
- 3) Recognize the professors with a gift – your product/service are potentials. Ask how you may help them. Offer to create an alliance where they can identify top students, and where you can give those students an internship.
- 4) Network with people (including your existing employees) who may know the people you are trying to attract.<sup>6</sup>

In regards to technology, it is very important that companies consider using an applicant tracking system (ATS), either independent of a Human Resource Information System (HRIS) or incorporated into an HRIS in order to track candidate progress through the course of recruiting. This technology is an invaluable aid in making notes of candidate concerns and recruiter

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<sup>6</sup> *Increasing Diversity Hires By Modifying Your Employee Referral Program*, Dr. John Sullivan, March 1, 2004  
<http://www.ere-media.com/ere/increasing-diversity-hires-by-modifying-your-employee-referral-program/>

conversations. It, also, provides an easy way to gauge and report on your diversity initiatives and monitor the process and consistency needed to properly implement an inclusive hiring project. Remember the end-goal is finding people who can solve a problem in a creative and successful manner using different perspectives.

### **Recruitment Process Improvement: Attracting Diversity Candidates**

If everyone in a company has the same background, recruiting them should be relatively easy. Follow what has worked in the past. When recruiting diverse candidates, a thoughtful strategy should be considered. Keep in mind, the sought-after candidate, diverse or not, will be researching your company, culture, processes, employee population, and company values. You will need to incorporate techniques to source and recruit, as well as illustrate your value proposition to these individuals.

When the decision has been made to fill a new or replacement position, ask the hiring manager probing questions to uncover any traces of bias: “Are the three, six and nine month goals the same for everyone in this role?” “What skills and experience match the goals in the job?” “Are candidates from specific schools more highly coveted, and if so, why?” “Does this position offer relocation?” “What personality traits are lacking from the current team/department that will benefit the outcomes?”

As previously stated, humans like to be with people who look, act, and share similar reactions to themselves. If your community is more homogeneous, it is important that your city/town supports your diversity hiring efforts.<sup>7</sup> People need to feel welcome and *welcomed* in their new community. The company (or the city/town) may need to create a department to ensure their spouses or significant others may also find satisfying jobs in the new community. One suggestion is for companies to create an alliance within the city where other companies interview spouses/significant others for positions within their organizations.

Some questions to help the interviewers prepare and answer the diversity candidates’ questions are questions they should be prepared to answer. They may include:

- Why is the company now interested in hiring diversity candidates?
- How will I be successful here and who will serve as a mentor?
- Are there people in leadership roles like me?
- Does the company support affinity groups?
- Is this a community where my family can live and thrive?

These may be tough questions initially, but once your company hires the early adopters who feel they are treated fairly, answering these questions becomes much easier. The early adopters will be the people who will recommend other people within their network to join the organization and

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<sup>7</sup>The Wall Street Journal, *How to Increase Workplace Diversity*, <http://guides.wsj.com/management/building-a-workplace-culture/how-to-increase-workplace-diversity/>

become brand ambassadors. Developing a strong diversity hiring referral program goes a long way towards retaining your initial diversity hires because they see others they can identify with in your workplace. These programs are enduring and will engage them in the growth of the organization.

Of course, diversity hiring needs to be practiced at all levels in a company to be successful. The saying, “Leaders Lead” demonstrates that the company leadership needs to practice diversity hiring when leadership positions open. To not do this, risks the chance of middle managers continuing a practice of hiring employees as a knee-jerk reaction to “I’ll know the right person when I see him.”

Once a company broadens its recruiting to include diverse employees, the challenge is to manage everyone fairly. Some managers may be up to the task, while others will not have the ability to adjust their management style and will require training to help them understand and adhere to the new norm. Creating a melting pot of personalities, without adherence and acceptance by people in the leadership ranks, may create more harm than good and offset successful synergies within the organization.

Once the new culture is established, sourcing and hiring diversity candidates becomes easier because it’s expected and the company has a proven track record to attract and hire these professionals on an on-going basis.

Retention of diversity candidates is, also, crucial. Companies may need to make subtle changes in their culture; and some of those changes may not be so subtle, particularly if most everyone currently comes from one race, gender, or religious belief system.

### **The Positive Aspects Of Diversity Hiring**

Now the discussion has come full circle. A diversity hiring program benefits the company in multiple ways. The goal is having more people looking at problems and potential solutions from different perspectives to create new ideas and solutions leading to higher profitability. The additional positive aspects are created by developing a more effective recruiting process to attract all candidates; and a more effective onboarding program to impress and inform all new employees. If the offer is accepted and a commitment to a start date is agreed upon, the company’s onboarding program needs to ensure their first impression is a good one. This applies to every, single new employee; not just the diversity candidates. Remember, new employees will be watching how other employees are treated.

As new employees become more familiar with the corporate culture and processes, they will question why certain actions are taken. They will be engaged and that engagement may be contagious. Conversely, it is important to re-educate existing employees on the value of diversified thinking and the eminent value to them and how this meets with the long-term goals of the organization. As management strengthens its bench, the diversity employees help the



company to grow in new markets, developed technology, enhanced customer service, and create an atmosphere of innovation with the goal to improve profitability.<sup>8</sup>

Any homogeneous group whether they are men or women, same race, same religion, or same age who believe their ideas are the best and the only ones, are misguided to say the least. The benefits of diversity hiring far outweigh the challenges associated with growing a well-integrated team.

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<sup>8</sup> EqualityMagazine.com, *Why Hire Diversity?*, <http://www.equalitymagazines.com/index.php/why-diversify/why-hire-diversity>