

HR Compliance Library, ¶42,512, Making the case for diversity

Middle management buy-in. Middle management buy-in is essential to the success of any diversity initiative, according to a report from The Conference Board. Managers play a key role in hiring, development and promotion decisions. But they're often at direct odds with diversity practitioners—who by definition challenge the status quo—because they're generally rewarded for maintaining current results and therefore act as roadblocks to inclusion initiatives.

The Conference Board offered a number of strategies for getting middle management involved in the diversity process. They are:

- Executive leaders must carry the banner of diversity deeper into the organization. They should model the behaviors they want from middle management, such as attending diversity training and mentoring diverse employees.
- Companies should ask affinity groups to ground their efforts in business relevant issues. Ensure their programs have broad appeal beyond their direct constituency by addressing broad-based business issues or employee needs such as career development.
- Require all affinity groups to have executive sponsors that come out of the middle management ranks.
- Find a highly-respected manager who is ready to be a champion and ensure he or she gets high-profile visibility for his or her diversity commitment.
- Enhance education and awareness through relationships. For example, reciprocal mentoring with someone culturally different.
- Encourage middle managers to participate in local diversity councils. Have middle managers participate in diversity events as a speaker, panelist or host.
- Reward the champions. Tie financial rewards to performance and development plans. Recognize managers by putting role model awards on the corporate intranet.
- To make diversity sustainable, embed it in the performance management system. Conduct a 360-degree feedback process to gain input and observations on inclusive behaviors.
- Include cultural competence as a component of an Interview Skills Workshop to enhance managers' ability to connect with potential diverse candidates and ensure they hire the best talent.
- Use employee satisfaction surveys to identify areas where diversity resources could be used to help resolve what would otherwise be identified as HR or general organization issues.
- Be transparent about how goals are set and measured.
- Provide middle managers with internal and/or external resources when they need help dealing with diversity-related issues and challenges.
- Develop a Balanced Scorecard and publish it in a highly public way. A scorecard should have measurable behavioral changes such as employee satisfaction surveys, exit interviews, as well as measurable representation changes such as attrition, succession, etc.
- In talent reviews, include diversity/cross-cultural competency as a valued competency for the advancement of managers.
- Create a diversity index, which is a series of diversity-related questions asked of all employees through an existing employee engagement survey or as a stand-alone effort. Track trends over time.
- Identify middle managers who have several open positions and provide them with invitations to attend diversity recruiting fairs so they can meet a critical mass of candidates.

Link to profits. The business case for diversity in the workplace is simple: It can lead to increased revenues and profits. In short, diversity drives employee satisfaction, which drives customer satisfaction, which drives profits, according to Trevor Wilson of the Toronto consulting firm TWI Inc.

Basic fairness. The idea of diversity in the workplace is closely related to equity, Wilson said at a conference held in Washington by the Society for Human Resource Management. But equity should not be confused with equality, Wilson said. When a company treats its employees equally, it ignores their differences. When a company treats its employees equitably, it recognizes their differences.

"Diversity is about acknowledging any difference that can impact the fair or equitable treatment of people," according to Wilson. Among the many characteristics that may affect how people are treated are differences based on gender, race, age, sexual orientation, disability, religion, education, class and marital status.

Systems that are based solely on equity — or fairness and merit — will allow an organization to attract the most qualified workers, Wilson said. The equitable treatment of those workers will lead to higher employee satisfaction, which in turn will lead to increased commitment, retention and productivity.

Sources of workplace "unfairness." Inequity in the workplace generally stems from two sources, according to Wilson. The first is systemic discrimination, by which employees perceive that the system treats them unfairly because of their differences. The second, according to Wilson, is attitudinal discrimination, by which employees feel that people in the system treat them unfairly because of their differences. Inequity from either source is likely to lead to lower levels of employee commitment and productivity.

The sum is greater than the parts. Another case for a diverse workforce was laid out by Robert Hayles, a consultant based in Arden Hills, Minn. One definition of diversity Hayles presented is from the Deluxe Corp.: Diversity is "all the ways we are similar and different which affect our interactions and performance." And at the heart of Hayle's case for diversity is the claim that diversity drives creativity and performance. "On complex tasks, with equally skilled leadership, diverse teams will outperform teams that aren't diverse."