

HR Compliance Library, ¶42,515, Steps toward building workforce diversity

Like many other HR programs, cultural diversity programs take years to effect change on a fundamental level. Many organizations may be tempted to dive in and attempt to change the way people act and believe that, by doing that, they have solved the problem. This approach will lead to a big start for the program and a perilous end.

Corporate culture change. To really affect the culture of the company in an attempt to accommodate ethnic sensitivity and diversity, the companies must first determine why people act the way they do. Once that has been identified, the organization can take steps to modify that behavior.

To change the corporate culture, one must first know what it is. This may require some in-depth research in the form of a questionnaire or other surveying device. In the survey, a company will want to inquire about the employees' perceptions of how they are treated at the company and their perceptions of how minorities as a whole are treated, among other things. Once that data has been analyzed, the company can make some determinations about how it wants to proceed.

Reinforce diversity principles. Once the company has determined what kind of steps it wants to take to instill cultural sensitivity in its workforce, there are several ways that it can go about reinforcing its principles:

- **Obtain commitment at the top.** The first step in a diversity program is to obtain commitment and accountability at all levels, and particularly senior levels, for the successful implementation of diversity.
- **Hold management accountable.** To meet this objective, make performance reviews and incentive awards reflect the organization's diversity initiatives, and hold managers accountable for their diversity performance. Make it the responsibility of managers to treat all employees with the same respect, dignity and value as they do customers.
- **Reward those who embody the workforce diversity principles.** Do not reward those who dismiss diversity's importance to the organization's success. Consistency in policy and action is extremely important. A company ought not endorse one management style and reward another.
- **Encourage employee participation.** Management initiatives alone are not enough. Encourage employees to see that it is also their responsibility to identify, discuss and address the most stubborn obstacles to diversity. Create diversity councils to serve as the voice of employees and to act as catalysts in building a more diverse workforce. The councils can identify issues and prioritize needs.

Focus initiatives for targeted results. Know what you want to achieve with your initiatives.

- **Recruiting.** If the current number of minorities and women at a particular level or business unit — senior management, perhaps, or in accounting — is slim, focus your recruiting and promotion efforts on increasing the diversity of representatives at all levels of the organization by:
 - (a) Identifying specific placement opportunities among the organization's senior jobs.
 - (b) Identifying internal candidates with the required skills and experience.
 - (c) Actively recruiting candidates from the external job market.
 - (d) Identifying internal candidates for development for future promotion opportunities.
- **Mentoring.** Establish a mentoring program to provide employees with the support they need to be successful in the organization by fostering individual personal relationships to enhance professional growth and development.
 - (a) Develop a process to match up appropriate mentors with internal or external high-potential candidates.
 - (b) Coach mentors in how to nurture talent and professional growth.
 - (c) Don't make the common mistake of targeting only a particular under-represented group for mentoring; make sure your mentoring program is itself diverse and inclusive.

- **Training.** Develop programs that help employees learn to use their specific strengths to enrich the work process and to be open to the differences of their coworkers. Review all current training programs and, where necessary, revise such programs to include a diversity component.
- **Recognition.** Take action to instill a corporate culture that encourages all employees, at all levels, to believe in the value of people. Constantly recognize, both formally and on an ad hoc basis, the value of a unique and diverse workforce.
 - (a) Reaffirm the commitment to workforce diversity whenever possible, such as at company functions, award ceremonies, orientations, retirement parties.
 - (b) Identify methods to force interaction between nondiverse groups through shared assignments, task forces, and planning committees. The interaction that results helps to break down the barriers.
 - (c) Communicate. Use formal and even informal communications channels to reinforce the notions of workforce diversity.
- **Recognize the needs of a diverse workforce.** The needs of a diverse workforce need not be high-maintenance, but they do require a heightened awareness of cultural issues.
 - (a) In workplace communication, remember to address the requirements of non-English-speaking employees; of those with disabilities; of telecommuters and contract workers who may not be at the work site. Even in cases where all employees speak English, there may be spoken language barriers that are more common and subtle than written barriers.
 - (b) In setting dress and appearance policy, take into consideration the religious requirements of specific headwear (hats, yarmulkes, headscarves, turbans, etc.) or physical appearance (length of hair, beards, etc.).
 - (c) In planning holiday celebrations and time away from work, consider nonJudeo-Christian populations' interests and values. Be sensitive to observing of religious holidays, allowing prayers breaks, accommodating dietary requirements or dress and grooming habits, and religiously motivated objections to training programs, patriotic programs, and national holidays.
 - (d) Companies with large segments of a different cultural group may want to invest in some cross-cultural training to help bridge the gap between the customs of that group and the rest of the workforce.