

Reflecting the Talent You Want to Recruit: Building and Achieving a Diverse Team and a Better Business

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Most of us have probably experienced a situation where we felt we were not treated equally in the workplace. Recently, employers have answered the call with updated and renewed pledges for improving diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) to promote and achieve much-needed changes. While we have all heard these three words repeatedly, it remains critical that we continue to discuss and understand what they mean and how to incorporate them into our everyday lives. In 2022, “belonging” was added to DE&I to form DEIB. The Oxford dictionary defines belonging as “the feeling of being comfortable and happy in a particular situation or with a particular group of people and being treated as a full member of the group.” It is “belonging” that ties the three components of DEI together to build an inclusive culture within an organization.

Employee Engagement

In business, one strategy to improve the culture and behavior of company personnel is to ensure that employees are actively involved in identifying DEIB issues. Having employees participate in developing and implementing solutions creates a supportive, positive, and inclusive culture. As highlighted in *Forbes*, “DEI work needs to be managed as a business function, not an HR program.” Accordingly, it is imperative to establish diverse leadership teams, a component which is often lacking as organizations tend to focus more on increasing representation at non-executive levels.

To create a positive culture, there are a few things a company should do to ensure that the employee base is diverse from entry level to senior management. These include:

- establish new hire orientation programs;
- schedule ongoing training, including unconscious/implicit bias programs and anti-harassment and empathy workshops, and;
- provide opportunities to foster allyship.

Additionally, employers should consider providing a hotline for reporting DEIB incidents and a “warmline” for advice and coaching; making full use of employee resource groups or networks; and offering inclusive mentorship and sponsorship programs. Company culture is where good DEIB practices begin, and an ongoing commitment is what enables a firm to thrive.

A report by consulting firm McKinsey (Diversity wins: How inclusion matters, 2020) revealed that companies in the top 25% for gender, racial and ethnic diversity performed better financially. Even with strong data supporting DEIB efforts, organizations still struggle with attracting and retaining diverse talent because they do not make it a core priority. Your recruiting staff needs to know and demonstrate that a diverse and inclusive workplace is a fundamental goal. Think about the hiring process – is your interviewing panel diverse? Applicants want to see themselves reflected in the people who interview them. A non-diverse interviewing panel

can send the message that the company may not be as inclusive as indicated or that there is a lack of diversity in the decision-making pool.

However, hiring diverse talent is not enough. It is the workplace experience that shapes whether they remain and thrive. Joining a company is a commitment to who that company is as much as it is about the job being performed. The McKinsey study further revealed that companies that are successful in DEIB efforts often have diverse representation in leadership and critical roles. They also set goals and accountability benchmarks for delivering on DEIB goals and enable equality of opportunity through fairness and transparency.

Partnering With Diverse Vendors

Successful organizations make partnering with diverse vendors a priority. Such partnership drives innovation and competition and can provide companies with the ability to attract new customers, forge better existing customer relationships, and attract top talent. While there is a great deal of enthusiasm and energy around building diverse vendor teams, there should also be a clear strategy on how to maintain strong partnerships once they are in place.

Investing in a partnership takes many different forms for a company and business. To succeed, companies should give diverse vendors visibility to their team and key stakeholders. It is also important to schedule periodic check-ins with vendors to provide feedback, identify opportunities for improvement, and discuss new products and services that may benefit the company. Once a good working relationship is established, help vendors grow their business by being a

good reference and referring them to other industry colleagues and companies.

Companies should be intentional in their efforts to partner with diverse vendors by continuing to seek them out at conferences and meetings, and through industry organizations. When seeking new vendors, management should insist that diverse vendors be considered. Eliminating internal hurdles and finding ways to streamline the onboarding process make it easier for management to embrace the process. Taking that first step of requesting to work with more diverse teams even when the vendor may not be certified as diverse will help make a company operationally stronger. Finally, being persistent but realistic, and recognizing that while some vendors may not be a good fit, there may be other qualified diverse vendors with whom a successful partnership can be formed.

All companies desire to build a diverse workforce to improve the firm's operational and economic position. However, building a diverse team takes commitment, understanding and unbiased honesty. Once companies understand and undertake the hard work and dedication needed to tackle this goal, then DEIB can flourish.



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