

## **There Are Ways Other Than Hiring to Promote a Diverse Workplace** *Contributed by Peter Gray, Executive Search Manager at The QTI Group*

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We live in an age of accelerating diversity. Look around:

America's, Wisconsin's and greater Madison's populations are growing more diverse; the world is growing so small that even the smallest business can have global exposure; niche marketing rules; every generation accepts diversity more than the previous generation; and nimble reaction to new information can be crucial to business success.

In this context, embracing diversity in the workplace is not about altruism or regulatory compliance but about a simple question: If we fail to embrace diversity, what business upsides do we cede to our competitors?

What steps can you take to increase the diversity of your organization's workforce? Employers sometimes ask me and my colleagues, as recruiters, to help them find qualified "diversity candidates" to interview, such as people of color (if the employer's workforce is mostly white), or women (if the organization is mostly male).

(An aside to my gentle readers: Did you like that wonderful euphemism, "diversity candidates"? More such artful phrases lie ahead. Read on, and enjoy.)

Does the hiring of diversity candidates actually help employers reap the benefits of more diversity in the workplace? Sometimes yes, sometimes no. It's a step in the right direction, but it takes more than that.

Some employers gain reputations as positive, diversity-friendly environments, and become talent magnets for high-performing workers, including diversity employees. Others don't. And some find it difficult to become more diverse despite heroic efforts to fill vacancies with qualified diversity talent.

Why is that? Because organizations succeed at attracting and retaining diverse workforces not simply by looking for diversity candidates at hiring time, but by adopting policies that support a culture of flexibility and inclusiveness.

Ask yourself some questions about your employer:

- What is the generational profile of our workforce? Are Baby Boomers, Gen-Xers and Millennials comparably represented in the organization as a whole, and within business units and teams?
- What about our gender profile? Are men and women about equally represented in top management and throughout the organization?
- Does our organization's racial and ethnic composition mirror that of our customers, partners and community?
- Extra credit: How might a more diverse workforce help us connect better with our stakeholders, and help open new markets to us?

Those are questions about what your employee team looks like. Now ask some different questions:

- Does our paid time off include floating personal holidays?
- Does the organization support flexible work hours and telecommuting? For example, are employees' special scheduling needs, for things like child care and elder care, accommodated?

- Are our facilities handicapped-accessible?
- Do we offer wellness and fitness benefits?
- Do we sponsor or promote off-the-job group activities (such as family events, team sports or community service projects) that appeal to a broad range of our employees?

Finding a correlation between the answers to those two sets of questions is above this columnist's pay grade. But here's a hypothesis: The factors that attract and retain diversity employees are the same factors that attract and retain employees generally. People want to work in inclusive, flexible work environments with policies, benefits and activities that show respect for our variety – yes, our diversity – of lifestyles and personal needs.

So, if you want to take steps to increase the diversity of your organization's workforce, by all means ask your recruiter to look for diversity candidates. But don't stop there. Look for opportunities in your organization's policies, benefits and activities to build a more diversity-friendly culture.