

THE DAILY RECORD

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Diversity Conference:

Recruiting For Inclusiveness Makes Good Business Sense For Employers

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Is your organization proactive or reactive when it comes to diversity? Does your staff mirror your customer base?

Mauricio Velasquez talked about critical success factors in a lively session titled "Diversity Today, Inclusiveness Tomorrow" at the recent Diversity Conference 2004 in Rochester.

Part Two Of Five

"Take a look at who your customers and potential customers are and determine if you are meeting their needs," suggested Velasquez, telling a story about a retail operation that seemed

oblivious to the fact that 44 percent of its sales were to minority women. "And be aware that some clients ask their law firms about their diversity strategy before signing up for services. The top law firms all have a diversity score card readily available on the Internet."

(See <http://www.minoritylawjournal.com/spring04/texts/scorecard2004.html>)

Intent v. Impact

In a fast-paced presentation drawing on his experience as president of The Diversity Training Group in Herndon, Va., Velasquez told numerous stories about insensitive employers and co-workers.

"I didn't mean to insult her," acknowledged a witness in a discrimination suit. "Well, the veil of ignorance doesn't really cut it in court," responded Velasquez. "Just because someone doesn't intend to be derogatory doesn't change the impact. Oh, or you were just kidding? And that makes it all better?"

With an MBA in Human Resource Management, the bilingual, internationally known speaker has coached executives, authored dozens of articles, appeared on television and taught at numerous universities. He has seen and heard every excuse in the book, acknowledging that our litigious society is drowning in information but starv-



DEALING WITH DIFFERENCES — Seminar leader Mauricio Velasquez pauses to talk with conference attendees: Sheila Gaddis, executive director of VLSP, Charlotte Downing and Cynthia Clark, both from Monroe Community College's Curriculum and Program Development Department.

ing for knowledge.

"People don't look at the information they have in front of them to figure out how to avoid problems," Velasquez continued. "If turnover is high, are you doing exit interviews to find out why? If no minorities are being promoted, have you looked at what objective criteria are being used for promotions? Are the company's core values being enforced? Is leadership pay linked to diversity recruitment and retention?"

Rattling off dozens of questions, Velasquez also provided a practical list of action items to help conference attendees find ways to improve their own workplaces.

Business Case For Diversity

The goal is organizational success — that's why companies must build their recruiting and retention program around the business case for diversity, explained William Garland Shackelford, Jr. in his session titled "Diversity Recruiting Without Affirmative Action."

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"Affirmative action may have been a way to get minorities in the door, but, as many organizations learned, without attention to development and promotion, it is impossible to retain an inclusive workforce and management team," said Shackelford, who has been in the field of multicultural human resource consulting for nearly 20 years.

With a bachelor's degree in physics and a master's degree in nuclear science, Shackelford is driven to help organizations develop diversity programs and conduct diversity training. He has written many articles on the topic and has published a book titled *Minority Recruiting ... Building the Strategies and Relationships for Effective Diversity Recruiting*.

When a company calls him to inquire about diversity training, Shackelford asks a number of questions which he calls the "smel" test. Is the company looking at diversity for the right reasons, or is it simply buckling to social, moral, ethical and legal pressure?

"If it doesn't 'smel' right, then I don't believe I can assist the company. If, on the other hand, the organization has solid business reasons for seeking a more inclusive workforce, then we have a foundation to build on," he said.

Citing statistics which show that America's population is shifting, Shackelford warned that a time is coming when customers won't have any patience for organizations that don't embrace diversity.

"In the year 2030, the population will be at least 40 percent racial minorities and only 60 percent white," he stated. "If your current recruiting process tends to screen out many of the diverse candidates, take a look at the job qualifications. Are you focused on behavior-based, critical success skills? Or does the job description include 'nice to have' qualifications, that only the top socio-economic class will have obtained?"

In his handouts, Shackelford listed 22 tactics for moving from a closed recruiting environment to a more inclusive

employment effort.

"What are the mission critical skills for the job? What competencies does the job candidate need to demonstrate to succeed in the job?" he asked, noting that in Florida, being bilingual may be more important than a college degree in an environment where more than 50 percent of the population speaks Spanish.

Shackelford also emphasized the importance of outreach efforts to build a strong future for your organization. Are you working with local schools so they know what your future employment needs are? Are you creating a work atmosphere that respects the individual and demonstrates across the board opportunities?

"If the real goal is to create a workplace where the best rises to the top, fighting the battle over affirmative action will get us no closer to achieving that goal," wrote Shackelford in one of his handouts. "Let's spend our time, energy and money fighting for upward mobility in the workplace and let market pressures, demographics and the courts fight the battles for equal access along the way."

Local Perspective

Part five of this series will get into more depth about local diversity initiatives.

"This conference was remarkably different than many I've attended," noted Theresa Conroy of Harter, Secrest & Emery. "These sessions had practical nuts and bolts advice that we could take back to the workplace and use. So many times, conferences are all theory and no application."

Sandy Harris, senior director of diversity at Thomson West, also spoke highly of the programs.

"The speakers provided confirmation for some of our own discoveries, and reassured us that we are heading in the right direction," Harris said. "There is always more work to do, but it was gratifying to hear from some of the nation's top diversity advisors that we are building a solid foundation."