INCLUSIVE RECRUITING:
What Employers Need to Know to Gain the Benefits of Diversity

By Allison O'Kelly

Why should you focus on recruiting to drive diversity in the workplace? Quite simply, following a year marked by calls for social change, more executives are looking for human resources professionals to be agents of change. Those same organizational leaders are likely citing persuasive evidence that companies with diverse workforces are measurably more successful.

In a January 2018 report titled *Delivering Through Diversity*, authors with McKinsey & Company noted that companies with the most ethnically and culturally diverse executive teams were 33 percent more likely to have industry-leading profitability. Conversely, the least diverse companies were 29 percent less likely to outperform peer organizations. At the board level, the impact of diversity was even greater: "Companies with the most ethnically/culturally diverse boards worldwide are 43 percent more likely to experience higher profits," the McKinsey authors wrote.

A Boston Consulting Group study that was also reported in January 2018 similarly revealed that companies that achieved above-average diversity on management teams realized "innovation revenue that was 19 percentage points higher than that of companies with below-average leadership diversity—45 percent of total revenue versus just 26 percent."

Diversity also helps employers compete for the best talent because job seekers value it. When Glassdoor surveyed nearly 2,750 workers in August 2020, three-quarters (76 percent) of respondents agreed that a "diverse workforce is an important factor when evaluating companies and job offers."

Transforming an organization's workforce and culture is more than a one-and-done recruiting task, of course. It is an ongoing form of change management. Savvy HR professionals can approach recruiting efforts in practical ways that help achieve the complex goals.

What Does Diversity Look Like?

Undertaking recruiting with an eye toward increasing diversity can feel a bit like preparing your home for guests: You suddenly see all the things you have been meaning to fix up or had never noticed until now. Embrace that shock of recognition as a source of useful energy. If you want to make meaningful change, try to take a fresh look and evaluate your organization as an applicant might see it.

Candidates will be examining your organization for signs of a diverse and inclusive workforce. According to Glassdoor, one in three job seekers will not even apply to an organization that lacks diversity. The website's survey further revealed that "this is significantly higher for Black (41 percent) job seekers and employees when compared to white (30 percent) job seekers and employees, and among LGBTQ (41 percent) job seekers and employees when compared to non-LGBTQ (32 percent) job seekers and employees."

Examine the Leadership Team

What will candidates see when they view the executive team on your website? If leadership consists of mainly cisgender white men—with few women, people of color or individuals from other underrepresented groups—there is an opportunity to grow.

An organizational commitment to diversity starts at the top. Because leaders highest up in the organization make key decisions, set policies and create cultural priorities, they are ultimately responsible for ensuring diversity at all levels. Making changes to the executive team can significantly advance the cognitive diversity required to drive innovations and succeed in making the workplace and its culture more inclusive.

Look at Culture

Additional markers of organizationwide diversity are representation on and engagement with your social media pages. Before launching a push to recruit for diversity, search your public channels for mentions of diversity, inclusion, employee resource groups and related topics. Ask who is participating on LinkedIn and Facebook.

Other questions to ask include

- Do your social media posts create an attractive impression of gender and ethnic equality in job roles?

- Are there any red flags such as consistently identifying women as support personnel and men as managers or skilled professionals such as engineers?

- Are personal and professional achievement for a diverse mix of employees depicted by highlighting awards, promotions and recognitions?

Also let your marketing or communications team know about plans to recruit for diversity and invite ideas on ways social media channels can support and enhance the effort.

Pull Some Key Performance Indicators

Human resources initiatives reflect what matters most to an organization. Keeping that in mind, make diversity matter by sharing gender and ethnic breakdowns of the workforce with executive decision makers. If those numbers are not readily available, that itself may indicate that objectives or meaningful plans for achieving diversity on a practical timeline are lacking.

As you prepare to launch and assess your recruiting effort, start with what you know about the organization's workforce. Use that data to create a baseline for selecting key performance indictors (KPIs) so you can set goals and measure progress. In addition to comparing results to the baseline, compare the current effort to earlier recruiting campaigns so you can track progress over time.

Prepare to Listen

Conversations between candidates, employees and employers should inform any recruitment campaign. Essential questions to answer are what employees really think about the employer and their work experience, as well as what the onboarding process is like for new hires.

Surveys can help. Conducting them is a direct way to invite feedback, but it works best when anonymity is guaranteed. In fact, the 2020 Glassdoor survey revealed that "71 percent of employees would be more likely to share experiences and opinions on diversity and inclusion at their company if they could do so anonymously."

If your organization already regularly conducts candidate experience surveys as part of the recruitment experience, consider including questions on diversity and inclusion. In all events, mine your existing data.

For instance, insights can be gleaned by breaking out historic customer satisfaction data by demographic categories. Overall expressions of dissatisfaction with services by members of underrepresented groups could be red flags for employees' dissatisfaction with work culture, opportunities, inclusion or empowerment. At the very least, such findings would indicate the need for more cultural sensitivity.

Surveys and data analytics are no substitutes for open communication as a tool for building and maintaining a strong culture, but they can help leaders anticipate problems and provide timely insights on what can be done to reduce churn and the loss of valued talent. All forms of feedback will assist with identifying unmet needs and sparking ideas for initiatives that can enhance organizational culture and success.

Let the Search Begin!

Once equipped with insights from the review of the organization and its workforce, you are ready to set informed goals for recruiting for diversity.

Set Clear Goals

SMART—specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-framed—goals are the gold standard. So, what are the SMART goals for your current recruiting effort?

Recruiting

If you want to hire more women for IT or top management, note how many women are in the given role now and set a KPI for how many you want to hire. When setting the KPI, answer questions such as

- What percent do want to see in a year?

- Which internal candidates might there be, and what processes are in place for mentoring or inviting those candidates into the targeted roles?

- Based on the availability of internal candidates, how many candidates will you need to recruit externally now and at what level?

Expand Your Search

Diverse sources yield a diverse pool of candidates. Use job boards that you know will be used by a diversity of candidates. If advertising, consider outlets that serve minority communities. Ensure that your team builds relationships with alumni of historically Black colleges and universities and with other educational institutions, professional organizations and economic development groups that serve LGBTQ+ people and communities of color. If your organization allows, offer targeted scholarships and consider paying bonuses for referrals of candidates who become new hires.

Consider, too, any ways that the trend toward remote work can open doors to geographically diverse candidates, people with significant caregiving responsibilities and individuals with disabilities. Removing the obstacles of transportation and commuting can greatly expand the pool of qualified candidates.

Update Your Processes

HR professionals can help managers and supervisors avoid using gendered language to describe the ideal candidate for a position. Review the wording of job listings to eliminate descriptors that suggest a woman or a man is preferred. Examples of what to no longer write are "An attractive presentation and bubbly personality are required" and "Looking for someone aggressive and ambitious."

Program your applicant tracking system (ATS) to filter for specific skills and experiences to create a shortlist of candidates. Remove names from resumes that make it through the ATS before having an HR staffer personally review them.

Conduct preliminary interviews over the phone or via a recruitment platform that conceals personal information. Eliminating the influence of potentially biasing factors such as race, sex, age and appearance from the initial stages of candidate screening significantly increases the likelihood of having a diverse pool of candidates for in-person or videoconference interviews.

Plan for Ongoing Success With Remote Employees

Extend a warm welcome to newly hired colleagues, especially if they will be working remotely. Send an email thanking the person for joining your team and follow up by delivering swag such as a logo t-shirt, water bottle and laptop stickers Include a handwritten personal note in the swag bag.

For remote workers, schedule a training session before the official first day to introduce them to the software and systems they will be using. Send essential links to organizational information, a daily checklist of tasks and an org chart.

Also use that time to talk a new hire through what to expect on their first day. It may even make sense to set up a separate video call to introduce them to their managers and teammates so they can hit the ground running.

During the preemployment meeting, ask your new remote teammate to share details about the city they live in, where they previously worked and the skills they bring to the team. Find out what they are most looking forward to in their new role, their hobbies and whether they would mind posting selfies or pet pictures to the team's group chat.

On your end, clarify job responsibilities, individual and team goals, and personal expectations. Provide a checklist of small tasks to complete to reinforce learning about products or services, role requirements and culture. Once the new hire starts, have a day-by-day plan for orientation, training sessions and question-and-answer calls. Whether they are working remotely or on-site, ensure your new hire knows the technology and other routes of communications for keeping dialog open with you and other colleagues. Encourage them to request help when they need it.

Bringing diverse talent into your workplace creates opportunities for increasing inclusion and gaining its benefits. As a start, you can connect your new hire with an internal mentor. Whether this is an assigned person or someone the employee chooses on their own, the mentor should be a senior member of the team who is available to provide guidance and support.

Some organizations assign "welcome" mentors. Others invite the establishment of longstanding mentor-protégé relationships. Either approach can produce immediate and long-term benefits for the employee and the organization. A meaningful mentoring relationship promotes bonding, open dialog, fresh ideas and upward mobility.

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