



## **The Power of Diversity and Inclusion**

by [Myra Howze Shiplett](#)

President of RandolphMorgan Consulting

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An organization that understands and values diversity is more productive, is able to attract and retain the best talent, and provide an improved quality of service to the citizens it serves. The most creative and successful organizations are those that are able to recognize and energize the great variety of talents employees bring to the workplace.

"We like to say that we are in the business of maximizing neurons per salary dollar," says global diversity strategist Trevor Wilson. "An organization that understands and values diversity realizes that all neurons or brain cells are the same color even though the packaging may be quite different."

When employees come from diverse backgrounds -- whether racial, ethnic, religious, social, economic, educational or experiential -- the organization benefits. Diversity leads to positive creative tension, which increases intellectual curiosity, supports creative thinking and sets the stage for innovative solutions to organizational challenges, allowing the organization to achieve more effective results.

"The dynamics of diversity can affect the core of an organization, because it provides the framework for identifying the unique impact of cultural differences in the workplace," says Jessie Lane, the diversity program manager for the US Secret Service. "As we embrace those differences, we can, in turn, create an environment where all employees can take pride in knowing that their individual contributions helped to ensure organizational success."

How then to capitalize on the diverse talent pool within an organization? The steps are simple and straightforward. At least once a year, or as specific assignments arise:

- Review your organization's strategic goals and outcomes, and the competencies needed to achieve them.
- Then review the experience, education, background, contributions

and contacts of each staff member. This will allow you to specifically align what the organization needs to accomplish with employee talent to achieve the goals and outcomes.

- Decide how to best match the diverse talents of each staff member to help achieve the strategic goals and objectives. What assignments can be given to each staff member? Who has the contacts within the stakeholder (or customer) community to convince stakeholders (or customers) that the policy is the correct one? Or who will the community trust to deliver the message from your organization?
- Discuss these matches with individual staff members, and more generally with the entire staff. You may find yourself pleasantly surprised at the number of creative ideas and suggestions that will be forthcoming.
- Based on these discussions, make or revise assignments accordingly.
- As new assignments or opportunities arise, repeat this analytical exercise before making the work assignment.

It's also imperative that the organization's leaders set the tone by creating an open, welcoming organizational climate and create work processes that require employees to work together. "The organizations that get this right," says Wilson, author of *Diversity at Work: The Business Case for Equity*, "will ultimately win the war for talent by creating equitable and inclusive work environments that are attractive to a diversity of talent." He cautions that "People will determine pretty quickly if a leader is walking the talk or simply spouting platitudes."

Lane adds, "In developing the diversity strategic plan, it is important to involve a cross section of employees who represent every facet of your organization. This diverse representation fosters an environment of inclusiveness and lays the foundation for successful team building." When employees feel a sincere comfort level with one another, they are more apt to risk being different and to share their varied experiences and insights. A few things leaders can do to create this open environment:

- Welcome new ideas, new ways of thinking and acting.
- Seek opinions from diverse groups of employees.
- Recognize the successes that have come to the organization because it has created a workplace with employees who have unique experiences and talents.

"The ability to effectively engage human capital to work diligently toward a common goal is the measure of an organization's success," says Lane. "The benefit of a diverse workforce is that it encourages an atmosphere of mutual respect and serves to maximize organizational effectiveness."

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