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## Attracting and Retaining a Diverse Work Force

BY CONNIE ROBINSON

Few companies today would argue the bottom-line value of diversity in the workplace. Numerous studies have shown that companies whose ethnic and gender diversity reflects that of their customers consistently outperform their less diverse competitors.

The key question is how to achieve a truly diverse work force. A three-layered approach might be worth a try.

**1. Sensitivity training:** An excellent first step for companies just beginning to explore diversity. Usually conducted by an outside specialist, this helps employees understand and explore cultural biases. To be effective, training must involve the support and participation of senior management. Without their buy-in, it can easily be perceived as an “optional” exercise and thus not be taken seriously.

**2. Diversity sourcing and recruitment:** Should be coupled with sensitivity training, which helps increase a worker’s diversity awareness, while diversity recruitment helps them experience what it is like to actually work alongside a diverse co-worker. Only then do employees begin to understand they have much in common with people from different backgrounds.

**3. Effective retention program:** It is important to note how crucial the first two layers are to retention. If an employee, once hired, begins to feel the organization is simply paying lip service to diversity, they will quickly begin looking elsewhere. One example of a retention strategy is to establish a forum, such as a cultural council, where diverse employees can share their concerns/experiences and develop suggestions for how the organization might improve its diversity efforts.

Companies that are able to weave this three-layered approach into their organizational culture and values are more apt to have an effective, talented and diverse work force.

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