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# Moving Beyond the Numbers: How to Recruit, and Retain a Diverse Workforce

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**Part One of a Two-Part Report on How to Recruit and Retain a Diverse Workforce.**

**by Simma Lieberman**

The United States population is diverse. It's no longer a question of when the workforce will change. It already has. There has been a huge increase in women, people of color and immigrants in the workforce in the last twenty-five years. Diversity is not just a "good idea", today, it is a business imperative if you want to stay competitive, innovative and secure a larger market share.

Executives leaders are asking the question "How do we recruit, engage, and retain that diverse workforce." In order to answer that question, we need to identify common diversity

mistakes, perceived obstacles, best practices by other leaders in organizations, and then determine the solution that works for you.

## **Common mistakes in diversity recruitment**

Organizations make two common mistakes that cause them to fall behind their competition and even lose market share.

- [Reading Room](#)
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## PowerPulse

1. “*Company photo diversity*”  
The organization only considers the visible dimensions of diversity primarily race, and gender. The company photo looks good but everyone thinks the same. Differences that include sexual orientation, geographic background, thinking and communication style, work function, ability and disability, religion, and work style are not valued and are even discouraged. This is a very narrow definition of diversity and offers little or no value to the organization in terms of new ideas, creativity and innovation.
2. “*Diversity by Numbers*”  
Again diversity is defined by what you can see. Demographics reflect the outside community but it is only at the lower levels. (Production, and unskilled labor) There is little or no diversity as you move up into management. When questioned about diversity in their organization, they point to all the numbers. Every year they have good “numbers”, but the people are constantly changing. Employees leave and get jobs where there is a value of diversity at all levels and they are encouraged to move up in the ranks.

## Addressing the Issues

To be a successful business in today’s culture you need to create an environment of inclusion where people feel valued and integrated into a company’s mission, vision and business strategy at all levels. When employees’ skills and knowledge are recognized, appreciated and utilized they are more engaged in contributing to an organizations’ success. They are more willing to go the ‘extra mile’ and share ideas and innovation. The visible and invisible dimensions of diversity that they bring are used as resources for success and growth. In order to create an inclusive work environment you need a diverse workforce.

## Recruitment: Assess your need

Clarify your definition of diversity. Include the visible as well as the invisible dimensions. Conduct a culture assessment of your organization, department or function using focus groups, interviews or surveys. Determine whether one or all of these methods would be most appropriate. Get feedback from customers and identify the needs of any potential market groups.

Develop a strategy and implementation plan for a diversity/culture change initiative. Any culture change must be driven by senior management, and include the whole organization. Address all systems and processes including recruitment, employee engagement, retention, and promotion and performance evaluation.

## There are three common reasons why organizations “drop the ball” and don’t move

## **forward.**

1. *“Analysis and data nullification”*  
When the assessment is completed, and data analyzed, leadership is in denial about the results. Employees lose any trust or hope developed as a result of participating in the assessment. Leadership places blame on employees for having “hidden agenda”.
2. *“Short -cut solution”*  
Leadership listens to the report and decides that hiring a member of one of the underrepresented groups is the answer. Conducts executive search for best and brightest and declares solution found. There is no need and no time for any long-term strategy.
3. *“Diversity holding pattern”*  
Executive leadership holds strategy meeting, which results in “good ideas” or long-term vision, but there is no process of accountability or steps to implement specific actions. Other than discussing the need for more diversity in the organization there is no plan to change employee recruiting and retention methods.

## **How to Recruit, Engage and Retain a Diverse Workforce.**

### *Recruitment*

If you are serious about implementing a diversity/culture change initiative, you must create a diverse pool of candidates. If you always recruit from the same places, with the same methods, you will always get the same people. There is still the complaint “We looked all over and just can’t find any....” In today’s competitive market you need to be creative. You have to go where the candidates are and have a long enough lead-time to get a good selection of candidates.

- Research and develop a list of colleges that historically have large numbers of women, people with disabilities, and people from different cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds. Send recruiting teams to those schools.
- Begin to recruit from middle and high schools. Attend career days and come prepared to discuss the benefits of working for your organization and your industry. GOLDMAN SACHS began a program in 1998 called GS SCHOLARS to introduce high school students from historically underrepresented groups to introduce, interest and educate them to business and finance as a career.

Employers from the publishing industry have participated in career days and gone into middle schools in racially diverse areas to interest students in book and newspaper publishing.

When GE NUCLEAR couldn’t find enough qualified college graduates in nuclear engineering, they began to send recruiters to high schools to get people interested in the field before they went to college.

- Contact various student groups on mainstream campuses and ask them to suggest the best candidates or include notices about your organization in their newsletters or other vehicles for communication. Develop relationships with diversity related organizations; BLACK STUDENT UNION, NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS ORGANIZATION, ASIAN-AMERICAN STUDENT UNION, MECHA, LGBT organizations, etc.) and sponsor events.
- Send a diverse team to meet with people at schools and other recruiting sites and build relationships so your organization will be the company of choice to apply to work.
- Develop relationships with diverse community organizations and let them know about the opportunities in your organization. Sponsor events such as Juneteenth, Cinco de Mayo, Gay Pride, Chinese New Year and Disability Awareness Month.

DIAGEO has sponsored LGBT events during Gay Pride Week in San Francisco and has used marketing and PR people who specialize in the LGBT market.

Sodexo, a food and facilities management services company in partnership with the US PAN ASIAN AMERICAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE and the SODEXHO PAN ASIAN NETWORK GROUP have set up as scholarship for Asian American college juniors who are also involved in community service

- Identify new ways of reaching target markets. In 2002, NURSES FOR A HEALTHIER TOMORROW, a not-for-profit coalition of 37 nursing and health care organizations ran promotions in 436 movie theaters before movies like Spiderman and Star Wars in order reach a young market who might not have thought about nursing as a career.
- Create an information process informing all of your employees about open positions, and make it easy to apply. Be open to giving opportunities for excellence to people who are different than you. Become conscious of any biases you may have about other cultures, communication styles, and decision-making processes.
- Your criteria for interviewing and hiring should be based on qualifications and not just because you are more comfortable with someone who went to the same school, is the same religion or shares your gender or sexual orientation. Have a diverse panel conduct interviews so you can get other perspectives.
- Include diversity as part of your mission statement and display it on your website and marketing material. One of the first things a potential recruit will do in researching your company will be to look at your website. If it does not state and show a high value for diversity, there is a good chance that recruit will look elsewhere.

DIVERSIFIED MAINTENANCE SERVICES, a facilities service organization mentions the diversity of their management team in the first sentence of their mission statement. "DIVERSIFIED MAINTENANCE

SERVICES, INC. (DMS) has a diverse multicultural management team with decades of combined management experience, unique in their unparalleled vision and expertise.”

- Let suppliers and vendors that champion diversity know of any available positions and ask them for referrals.
- Market your diversity initiative throughout the organization so the word gets out that your environment is a great place for everyone to work. Identify any changes your organization has made regarding diversity and how diversity goals are being met.
- When using outside recruiters tell them you want a diverse group of candidates and have them show you their track record. There are executive recruiting organizations like THE ELLIOT GROUP and DIVERSE CONNECTIONS who can help you.
- Identify stereotypes of people who work in your industry and develop strategies for changing perceptions Ex. Firefighting should only be a male occupation. JOHNSON AND JOHNSON created a “discover nursing” campaign featuring male and ethnically diverse nurses in television commercials.
- Use more inclusive language and visuals in rule books, orientation, and recruiting materials. Make sure all pronouns aren’t female in industries like nursing and that all pronouns are not male in industries like law enforcement.
- Develop relationships with ethnically diverse professional associations and organizations; BLACK MBA, ASIAN MBA, HISPANIC CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, SOCIETY OF WOMEN ENGINEERS, Lesbian and Gay business associations, COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE FOR WOMEN, HACE (HISPANIC ALLIANCE FOR CAREER ENHANCEMENT) etc. Get their calendars and attend their conferences. Even if you are not hiring immediately, talk with people, and get the cards of people who might be potential recruits in the future.
- Advertise in magazines such as Hispanic, Black MBA, Asian Week, Working Women, Latina, Out and AARP as well as mainline economic journals and on-line publications. Use online recruiting websites that are used by different employee groups such as RECRUITABILITY and MONSTER.COM
- Be aware of your own biases and stereotypes and their impact on the environment Participate in high-level diversity training.
- Create processes to make people who are different from you feel welcome and included in your organization, and then use the media to alert potential employees that you are a welcoming inclusive employer.

Organizations like PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS and WELLPOINT advertise in Diversity, Inc and market the diversity of their employees as a strength. This not only increases their customer base but it helps promote them as employers of choice.

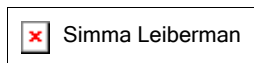
- Mentor people who are from different cultural or ethnic backgrounds or gender from you. It will help you become more

comfortable with other people and will help your staff grow in their careers.

- Incorporate ideas from other cultures to solve problems and be more Innovative.
- Use resources that are already in place and research what other organizations have done to be successful. Develop relationships with employee affinity groups and keep them apprised of any openings.
- Provide cross-cultural communication training to help staff work well together and serve the client population more effectively.
- Survey and interview staff across demographics to determine their needs in order to create a strategic plan for retention and increased recruitment under represented populations.
- Examine your definition of leadership qualities to include ways in which people who have different thought processes and communication styles can lead. If you have been hierarchical in the past, start learning that people with consensus styles can also be effective leaders and do not exclude them from the recruiting process.
- Conduct exit interviews and identify patterns and themes if they exist. Be willing to change to accommodate and use new ideas and creativity.
- Rethink your beliefs that a candidate should always have direct eye contact, be a certain weight or height, speak the way you do, have children, be single, lead in only one way, not be in a wheelchair, not be hearing impaired. Unless there are physical requirements to being able to do the job, don't let your biases exclude excellent candidates.
- Always send a recruiting team who have been trained in diversity and inclusion awareness and are willing to go beyond their comfort zone to attract the best candidates.

Part Two covers How to Create an Inclusive Environment that will Retain a Diverse Workforce.

About the Author: [Simma Lieberman](#) is president of [Simma Lieberman Associates](#), a multicultural organization offering programs focused on diversity training, gender communications, and stress management/life work balance. Her programs are tailored to individuals, businesses, government agencies, educational institutions, and community associations. Simma focuses on building strong relationships within an organization in order to enhance productivity, reduce employee turnover, improve communication, increase morale and decrease burnout. She transforms organizations by working at all levels of a company to help each person play a significant part in achieving success for the organization and meeting their own personal



career goals. She has been a popular online chat host and contributor on Oxygen.com and is regularly featured in national magazines and news sources. Simma has also been a national magazine columnist for Restaurant Hospitality. She has done extensive training with the Food Service and Hospitality Industry.

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