



Work Sample

Articles for website/Diversity Trends, LLC

Ambassadors to the Masses: The Diversity Council at Work

If there is one essential element to prolonged success of diversity in the workplace, it is the diversity council. Like so many group efforts, the diversity council achieves what a single CEO or management group cannot: Keep hold of the pulse of the company, and advise appropriately. It need not be large or top-heavy; the diversity council must first and foremost represent the employees. Fully, in all their shades of gray, both enthusiastic and cynical. At the rate our world is melding together, it would be impossible to conduct business if the diversity council consisted of even just a single representative from every gender, color, ethnicity, language, culture and age. And that's just a sampling of adjectives.

The simplest meaning of diversity is "difference." You could say diversity reflects whatever is "not me." We are humans, and we are each unique. Our experiences draw our beliefs, color our outlook and create our realities. This is what makes us so much fun. And what makes communication so much work.

How might a diversity council improve the work environment? Keep a few ideas in mind, adhere to agreed-upon rules, and, as a senior manager, executive or top dog, Listen. Really listen. Then take action.

Voluntary and changeable. Don't sentence people to life-terms on the diversity council. Make sure those who participate are committed. Represent a cross-section of your employees – don't forget immigrants and people low on the ladder. Overlap terms so that experienced council members can help new members learn quickly.

Focus your efforts and make them visible. Create a plan for the year. Identify one or two key areas to improve – use the TQM model for process improvement if it helps. Adopt and celebrate those changes. Inform all employees of your efforts, and don't shy away from "failures." Ingvar Kamprad, founder of retail giant IKEA, says that mistakes are the privilege of those who innovate. Make your mistakes, and record what you learned. Then move on.

Involve others. As executives and management teams, get to know the diversity council members. Join the council for a term or sit on a working committee. Support their efforts. Share what you know with your coworkers and subordinates. As a diversity council, engage the rest of the organization. Give presentations and invite participation regularly. Communicate what the council is doing.

Educate. Probably the primary function of a diversity committee is to teach employees. Depending on where the organization is at in recognizing and celebrating its diverse workforce, the council may need to hold conflict resolution workshops, presentations on who makes up the company and any number of awareness-raising activities. Diversity council members may need to teach and demonstrate expected behaviors. They may need to survey groups and assist in creating improved recruitment plans, or address accepted disrespectful attitudes. Cultural attitudes and differences may need to be explained.

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Carry the flag. Above all, members of the diversity council need to lead by example. Change takes time, especially in an increasingly diverse world. People are by nature resistant to change. Systems must be changed in small increments or risk self-destruction. And so the diversity council must practice patience while modeling the desired outcomes. A diversity council member's role is similar to that of a mentor.

The globalization of business means we are interacting with far more people every day. The majority of those people conduct business according to different cultural values, social norms and with different expectations. Forming a diversity council can mean keeping a competitive edge or injecting vigor into a languishing business area. Recognizing and valuing diversity no longer means venturing into world markets; it means being prepared to do business in your own backyard.

Diversity Council Core Competencies

- Building strategic partnerships
- Leadership
- Cooperation/teamwork
- Listening, creating "safe" arenas for dialogue
- Problem solving, managing conflict
- Offering resources
- Planning
- Advising

Examples of Diversity Representation

- Ethnicity
- Cultural background
- Citizenship
- Religion
- Disability
- Business unit, department, knowledge area
- Organizational level, e.g. manager, supervisor, entry level, line worker
- Age
- Race
- Gender
- Language
- Sexual Orientation
- Educational background
- Union affiliation
- Marital status