

Effectively Managing Diversity in the Workplace



And Being Loved By Those You Manage

By David Coreen and Michael Rocha, Davron Staffing

Think of a Leader/CEO/Director/Manager in your life who motivated you, inspired you, and gave you the spark to go above and beyond the call of duty. How would you describe that person? What traits or characteristics come to mind when you look back at previous conversations or interactions you had with him or her? Over the past 3 years, Davron asked hundreds of leaders in HR, management and the Executive Suite those very questions. Here is a sampling of the most frequent answers.

The Leader:

- Was fair and respectful to everyone on the organizational chart from receptionists to the highest levels of management.
- Had high personal standards in and outside of work.
- Really believed in my abilities and potential. Made me feel even more motivated after talking.
- Helped me believe in myself. Gave me self confidence and higher self esteem.
- Encouraged and challenged me.
- Led by example with a high work ethic. Walking the walk, not just talking the talk.
- Mentored and coached while displaying patience and poise.

- Asked and appreciated my ideas and point of view and more importantly implemented some of my ideas and viewpoints.
- Listened. Gave me a chance to express my thoughts without feeling rushed or insignificant.
- Criticized objectively and constructively.
- Had integrity, honor, high morals.
- Gave me the tools to help me solve my own problems.
- Had a vision that he/she always shared in an open discussion forum where diverse opinions were encouraged, not criticized.
- Made me feel like I could trust him/her without using my thoughts or ideas against me at a later time.

Fairness, respect, objectiveness, and listening recurred frequently when people described their favorite manager, however the word diversity or promoting a diverse environment rarely if ever was used in Davron's research and questionnaire.

The conclusion we drew from our survey was the key within a diverse environment is for the leader to be able to behave with all who come in contact with him or her with consistency rather than only employees with whom the leader is most comfortable. At the same

time it became very clear to us that although the word "diversity" rarely came up, the description of the leader and the team he/she built around themselves was very diverse. So why was diversity rarely used to describe the leader or the make up of the company's employees? The answer is when you have a diverse team and the leader has the characteristics described above, diversity in the workplace is a given, almost expected. Diverse points of view and building a diverse team was just expected, not out of the norm. It was only when the study participants were asked about leaders they did not like or want to work with was when lack of diversity in both opinion and team make up came up frequently.

So how do you go about developing the leadership skills so that diversity is an afterthought, a given? Leadership that embraces diversity requires a full commitment to demonstrate the following on a consistent, regular basis:

- **Learn the professional aspirations of all team members and support their efforts to achieve them.** Many organizations have some type of career development or succession planning process. In order to make these programs more effective within a diverse environment, be sure that you are talking to all of your staff about

their career aspirations. Even if your organization does not have many opportunities for individuals looking for upward mobility, your interest in their career and your assistance in their development will be greatly appreciated and usually motivates people to do their best work. If there are no opportunities within the organization and the employee ultimately leaves the company, your company then has a positive ambassador in the overall community.

- **Create opportunities for highly talented employees to be exposed to leaders who may not otherwise interact with them.** Create opportunities where they present a report, attend a meeting in your place, or conduct various other activities whereby they can interact with leaders in the organization who, if impressed, can impact their career in a positive way.
- **Create cross-functional teams.** As organizations have downsized, right-sized, and re-engineered their businesses, many management positions have been eliminated, thus requiring groups to work together as teams in order to complete the necessary tasks. When you create cross-functional teams, ideas flourish. People are exposed to each other's ideas and discover that different departments have different viewpoints. That exposure is beneficial to the overall innovation potential of the organization. When creating these teams, remember that putting people together does not automatically make them a team. Attention does need to be given to developing that group of people into an effective, trusting team. Davron can help you with team building exercises, feel free to contact us for further assistance.
- **Volunteer for community projects that teach tolerance, both directly and indirectly.** By doing this, you set the example that you are continually enhancing your understanding and appreciation of people different than you. That behavior can encourage others within the organization to do the same. For example, you may choose to become a mentor within the Big Brothers/Big Sisters organization. This can enable you to better understand young

people. The experience can teach tolerance and patience, and it can certainly help you appreciate that which is important to people whose backgrounds may be different than yours. These learnings have many applications in the workplace. To get a list of local charities in need of volunteers and match them to your skills and desires please contact Davron for more information.

- **Delegate fairly.** Sometimes we have a tendency to delegate to the same people all the time because they do good work and we know things will be done well. However, if we are going to truly develop all team members, regardless of their packaging, we need to identify projects, tasks, and responsibilities that could further develop their skills. Once the task is delegated, be sure to coach and counsel, and be clear regarding your expectations and the results.
- **Communicate and support intolerance of inappropriate and disrespectful behavior.** This must be an ongoing behavior on your part, one where you are constantly looking for opportunities to teach tolerance and respect within the workplace.
- **Evaluate performance objectively.** Employees really want to do a good job. The problem is often they don't know what a good job is, because the clues from management and leadership are unclear. Often the clues are different based on superficial or stereotypical judgments regarding age, gender or ethnicity. As soon as a person joins an organization, she or he should be given a clear job description, and the specific goals and objectives for that individual should be developed. The criteria for measurement should be clarified. Throughout the evaluation period, feedback should be given so that when the evaluation review is actually conducted, neither the manager nor the employee is surprised by the results. It is not easy being totally objective all the time. However, if the skills and expectations for the job are clear, the measurement criteria is clear, and the feedback is continuous, then it becomes easier for you to be fair with each employee.
- **Consider individual needs when enforcing company policies and**

guidelines. The idea is to be fair. However, "fair" does not necessarily mean "the same." There are times when you must decide how to implement policies without showing favoritism while recognizing differences. An example might be with work schedules. Although within a department, and within the same job category, everyone is probably expected to arrive at the same time and leave at the same time, it would be appropriate, when necessary, to allow flex-time as long as it is clear that the total amount of time required for work is covered. Job sharing is also helpful here. If parents have child-related issues, effective managers consider those issues and determine whether or not exceptions are necessary while balancing the effect of making those exceptions and their impact on the overall department. It is not an easy thing to do. Rather than try to develop the best idea alone, solicit input from the employees involved and from other managers to determine what the most appropriate action is.

You may have noticed that nowhere in this article have we mentioned doing things based on ethnicity, gender, disability, age, and the like. It is critical that effective leaders and managers realize that everyone in the organization contributes to its diversity. The more you are able to connect with individuals, the more you will be able to create an environment that causes them to produce at their highest level, regardless of their packaging. Our studies show companies that go out of their way to state gender, ethnicity, age, etc. policies are actually inviting greater employee scrutiny. If however the behavior of the company or its leaders encourages an environment that does not discriminate, diversity is a given and rarely challenged.

Some Actions You Can Take That Make a Difference

1. **Make time to talk privately with each of your employees on a regular basis.** For example, if you have 10 employees, provide each with 30 minutes every two weeks where they have the opportunity to share with you whatever they wish. They can ask any questions, give you ideas, and you have the opportunity to get

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to know them personally and coach and counsel them as necessary. For help with topics contact Davron and we can email you a questionnaire to get the ball rolling.

2. **Ask your staff, individually how they would prefer to be managed and how they would prefer to be rewarded.** Often we assume money is what everyone wants. Our studies show this is not necessarily true. Using learning assessments such as the AP Personal Profile (contact Davron for your free copy) or other tools to better understand communication styles and ingredients for the most motivating environments for different styles can be very helpful for both you and the employee. When you ask an employee how he or she wishes to be rewarded, you may discover personal interests, and professional aspirations that you can be supportive of. For example, perhaps one employee might be most motivated by having the company pay part of his or her child's tuition. A child-free person may be

most appreciative if the company provided additional vacation time so that she or he could visit a favorite place.

3. **Take your staff to lunch every now and then, just to chat.** The more actions you take to demonstrate sincere interest in the individual, the more likely your staff will want to "go the extra mile." The challenge is to be able to make the time. However, once you do, you will more likely see the real person, instead of just their "packaging." Their differences will then be an asset instead of a barrier.

There were numerous conclusions we at Davron drew from our questionnaire regarding a myriad of workplace challenges. But the one consistent conclusion when it came to diversity is companies that are indeed diverse are rarely described as such. However, companies that are not diverse are constantly taken to task by their employees and customers in some instances for not being more so. Use some of the actions you can take in this article to achieve workplace diversity. Doing so will dramatically increase

your employees' level of productivity and morale. And the great part about this is the cost is minimal and the return is tremendous.

For more information on workplace diversity, other employment practices, compensation guidelines, or staff augmentation, specifically when hiring engineering, technical, or IT talent, please contact Davron. ■

About the Authors:



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2009 Conferences and Training

Date	Topic	Location	PDHs
June 3-4	Water Facility State Revolving Fund Workshop	Amelia Island	4 Technical
June 4-6	Florida Engineering Leadership Institute (5 of 6)	Miami	N/A
June 5-6	FES Leadership Conference	Captiva Island	N/A
June 9-10	Mutual Gains Negotiations	Bartow	4 Technical
July 21-22	Mutual Gains Negotiations	Tampa	4 Technical
July 22-24	Advanced Work Zone Traffic Control	Tampa	20 Technical
August 5	Florida Laws and Rules	Palm Beach	4 Laws and Rules
August 5-8	Florida Engineering Leadership Institute (6 of 6)	Palm Beach	N/A
August 7	FES/FICE 93rd Annual Summer Conference & Exposition	Palm Beach	4 Technical
August 21-23	Civil PE Review, Fall, Part 1 of 2	Altamonte Springs	N/A
August 27	Advanced Work Zone Refresher	Altamonte Springs	6 Technical
September 15-17	FICE Roadside Design Course	Tampa	24 Technical
September 25-27	Civil PE Review, Fall, Part 2 of 2	Altamonte Springs	N/A

Format	Topic • Pricing	Location	PDHs
Online	Effective Use of Daylighting - \$200 FES/FICE Members • \$300 Non-members	www.fleng.org	4 Technical
Online	Essential Elements of Building Green - \$150 FES/FICE Members • \$250 Non-members	www.fleng.org	3 Technical
Online	Engineering Pitfalls in Stormwater Design - \$100 FES/FICE Members • \$200 Non-members	www.fleng.org	2 Technical
Online	Wind Load Design 2008 - \$200 FES/FICE Members • \$300 Non-members	www.fleng.org	4 Technical
DVD	New-Effective Use of Daylighting - \$200 FES/FICE Members • \$300 Non-members	850-224-7121	4 Technical
DVD	New-Essential Elements of Building Green - \$150 FES/FICE Members • \$250 Non-members	850-224-7121	3 Technical
DVD	Engineering Pitfalls in Stormwater Design - \$100 FES/FICE Members • \$200 Non-members	850-224-7121	2 Technical
DVD	Stormwater System Hydraulic Design - \$100 FES/FICE Members • \$200 Non-members	850-224-7121	2 Technical
DVD	Basic Lighting Design - \$200 FES/FICE Members • \$300 Non-members	850-224-7121	4 Technical
DVD	Wind Load Design 2008 - \$200 FES/FICE Members • \$300 Non-members	850-224-7121	4 Technical
Video	Stormwater Management: Advanced Topics - \$125 FES/FICE Members • \$225 Non-members	850-224-7121	Up to 4 Technical