



DETAILS

BY: KATE POLIT
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Roat, Spinks: Workforce Diversity Keys on Diversity of Thought, Culture

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While increasing workforce diversity is a top focus for many Federal agencies, Deputy Federal CIO Maria Roat and Marine Corps Deputy CIO Renata Spinks stressed this week that diversity must include diversity of thought, not just diversity of culture.

To get that diversity of thought, Roat said agencies must search for employees with different backgrounds than they would typically seek out. She shared a story of when she interviewed a woman who was fairly junior in her career and who had been with the Peace Corps before applying. Roat recalled that the woman had an incredible phone interview, and Roat hired her on the spot, describing the new hire as one of the best she made in her long career.

In addition to experience such as that gained in the Peace Corps, both Roat and Spinks suggested agencies look to military veterans.

Both Federal tech leaders spoke about what it has been like to be two women in upper-level management in a fairly male-dominated field.

Spinks said it has been essential for her to find woman mentors, both in and outside of the tech field. Additionally, she has worked with support groups that help improve diversity and empower under-represented groups. Tying back to the importance of diversity of thought, Spinks shared that one of the most important mentors in her life is actually her beautician. While not in the tech field like Spinks, she said she has learned a great deal about management and problem solving from her beautician.

Citing decades of working around mostly men, Roat said it is essential to focus on “women helping women,” and agreed with Spinks that it means focusing on mentorship. She said that mentorship lets women have “honest conversations” with “constructive feedback.” Those honest conversations frequently involve women giving other women a push to step outside of their comfort zone and try something new, she said.

In terms of improving workforce diversity, Roat said the Federal government needs to expand how it hires to target new people to apply for government employment. Specifically, she said agencies need to expand outreach to colleges – and even high schools – to reach students early on and get them interested in the Federal government’s mission.

One of the benefits of working with schools early on, Spinks explained, is that agencies can help universities develop the curriculum students need to be learning to be successful in government jobs. On top of that, Spinks said that early involvement lets agencies talk to students about the importance of security clearances, and what behaviors and activities students should avoid if they want to join the Federal workforce.

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Spinks also said agencies need to reevaluate how they write position descriptions for job postings to ensure diversity of thought and culture. In addition to expanding outreach to colleges and students, Spinks said agencies would be smart to look for talent exchanges across agencies, as well as recruiting from other agencies.

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