

## Article

### **Strategic Diversity Recruiting Process** ***It's the Process That Creates Success***

by *William (Bill) Shackelford*

There is no shortage of organizations (public or private sector) that have developed for themselves a compelling case for diversity recruiting ¼ a case that goes beyond it being “the right thing to do” to one that is anchored in the business case. Luke Visconti, partner and co-founder of DiversityInc. stated the business case well when he said, “How well a company manages its hiring, recruitment and retention practices directly affects its competitive edge and may well be the deciding factor in its very survival.”

However, even within organizations where diversity recruiting is recognized as a business case issue, many of them struggle with achieving the level of employee diversity desired or often required for success. Unfortunately, far too many hiring officials who are responsible for creating diversity in their organizations fail to realize that recruiting diversity is truly a science. Failure to understand this basic truth leads to abortive and fruitless forays and the mistaken conclusion that the problem is one of “supply and demands” (i.e., too few diverse candidates to fill the large demand). The solution to the problem often lies in the process used for recruiting.

When you benchmark organizations that have achieved high levels of success in diversity staffing, you find one thing in common. They all take a strategic approach to diversity recruiting. They understand that long-term success comes from a process that starts with building relationships within key sources and includes implementing strong strategies for retention. They know that a poorly conceived process has little chance of success – regardless of the merits of the plan. To reach the highest levels of success, organizations must abandon tactical approaches to recruiting (i.e., series of unconnected activities) in favor of a Strategic Diversity Recruiting (SDR) process.

#### **Strategic Approach to Diversity Recruiting**

The strategic approach to diversity recruiting links all activities together such that the synergy accelerates success. It allows organizations to avoid the problem of investing time, energy and resources into recruiting activities that do not lead to sustained results. A SDR process has five components ¼ **Culture Shift, Outreach, Recruiting, Retention** and **Management Infrastructure**. When these components are optimized to work together they create a chain reaction that unleashes the tremendous power of

the SDR process. However, organizations must realize that success is not so much dependent on any one of the components, but in the collective effect of all five. SDR is truly a case where “the chain is only as strong as its weakest link.” Organizations must have effective strategies for all five components.

### **Culture Shift**

A SDR process will only be successful in organizations that are ready for more diversity. They must have a culture where employees understand diversity as a business issue and value diversity as a business necessity. Do not make the common mistake of “assuming” employees are ready. David P. Hanna in his book *Designing Organizations for High Performance* made the profound statement that “All organizations are perfectly designed to get the results they get.” Hanna probably would conclude that eliminating diversity deficits in organizations requires changes in the culture of the organization as well as changes in strategies. The Culture Shift component requires organizations to identify and address the transformation required to create a culture that embraces diversity as a business imperative. This is usually accomplished through a formal assessment of the organizational culture and the implementation of changes recommended by the assessment.

### **Outreach**

The goal of the outreach component is to build a positive and consistent image of your organization in the minds of potential candidates, the people who influence the candidates and the communities in which they live. The outreach effort lays the foundation for future recruiting success by building strong, personal relationships with key contacts. It is through these relationships that organizations are able to recruit the best candidates. Because of the tremendous amount of effort required to build lasting relationships, the outreach component forces organizations to limit the number of recruiting sources. With over 4000 colleges and universities, more than one hundred Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and tens of thousands of professional organizations to choose from, choosing the right sources is a daunting but necessary task. Advertising, community outreach, supplier diversity programs and philanthropic efforts are all tools used for outreach.

### **Recruiting**

The goal of the recruiting component is to identify and attract talent from a diverse pool and to ensure that every candidate is treated fairly throughout the hiring process. Most recruiters focus on identifying and attracting talent for the organization. However, the

recruiting manager must be equally concerned that once talented candidates are identified – especially diverse candidates – they have a rewarding experience in their interactions with the organization. They must ensure that the application and screening processes are bias-free and that hiring managers do not let their subtle biases or cultural sensitivity knowledge gaps negatively impact the hiring process.

### **Retention**

Many recruiting managers believe their job is complete when new diverse candidates are hired. However, when you consider that organizations often spend tens of thousands of dollars to hire a single candidate, retention can be essential to the financial bottom line. Therefore, it is important for the recruiting manager to ensure their organization has strong on-boarding (orientation), mentoring, employee development and career counseling processes. In addition, the manager should assess the need for employee support groups and recommend the creation of ones deemed necessary.

### **Management Infrastructure**

To be successful, SDR programs require infrastructure that has been designed to support the long-term diversity outreach, recruiting and retention efforts. At a minimum, this requires a “central point of contact” that is charged with: a) developing strategic direction; b) developing an implementation plan; c) ensuring coordination of all activities; d) ensuring success of the effort; and e) sustaining the effort over time. Also, the central point of contact should find ways to get hiring managers involved in the design and implementation of the diversity recruiting program.

One of the critical management infrastructure issues in today’s workplace is the need to put in place strong accountability measures (including ROI). Organizations that have been identified as diversity leaders have documented compelling stories about the positive impact diversity has had on business success.

### **Tips for Implementing A Strategic Diversity Recruiting Process**

The following tips should be used to guide the development of your Strategic Diversity Recruiting program.

1. **Decide on the type of diversity recruiting program your organization will commit to building.** There are three alternatives: Active Program; Competitive Program; or Industry Leading Program. An active program means you are making the minimum effort to address diversity. Competitive means you are

seeking to match what your major competitors are doing. An industry leading program means your organization seeks to be the innovator with respect to diversity recruiting.

2. **Be clear about the business case for diversity recruiting.** For a diversity recruiting effort to achieve the highest level of success everyone in the organization must understand the rationale for the effort. **They must understand that diversity recruiting is not an affirmative action initiative but a business imperative.** This message must resonate from the top down. But first, leaders must be convinced that a diverse workforce is a business necessity. Also, they must be able to clearly articulate that message to employees.
3. **Make a 3 year commitment to the effort.** It will take time to build and implement the diversity outreach and recruiting effort. During the first year you should evaluate success in building the infrastructure for the effort. During the second year you should evaluate success in building relationships with key sources and the potential of each source for a long term relationship. During the third year you will be able to evaluate the overall diversity outreach and recruiting effort and its success in building a more diverse workforce.
4. **Use a “Phased Approach” and “Pilot Programs”** to ensure immediate successes. With large efforts such as this, it is often recommended that the effort is implemented in phases. This will allow your organization to match the annual scope of work (and related outcomes) to the financial and human resources that can be committed to the effort.

Another very effective strategy for rolling out new programs is to “Pilot” new initiatives. For example, if you plan to incorporate an internship program into your diversity recruiting program, you might want to pilot the program in one department/region. This will provide: a) early success for the diversity recruiting effort; b) an opportunity to refine the program before launching it organization-wide; and c) success stories that can be used to sell the effort to skeptical managers - - thus building broader commitment for the program.

1. **Start now to prepare the organization and its employees for diversity.** One common barrier to successfully implementing a diversity recruiting effort is leaders assuming their managers have the skills to implement the effort and that managers and employees will automatically understand and embrace the vision that the leaders have for diversity. Both assumptions are almost always incorrect. Organizations must teach managers the specialized skills associated

with diversity outreach, recruiting and retention. Also, they must teach managers and employees new skills for working and managing in a diverse environment. Specialized training on inclusion, cultural sensitivity and diversity recruiting will fill this gap.

## **Conclusion**

Effective diversity recruiting programs are always driven from the top. The executive team must be committed and must demonstrate their commitment by providing the resources needed for success and by continuously inquiring about the status of the effort. Others in the organization should be inspired by the example set by the executive team. Leaders should ensure success through continuous evaluation, the removal of roadblocks and continuous process improvement.

In addition, leaders should prepare the organization for diversity. Diversity recruiting will change the mix of people in your organization, interactions in the workplace, skills required to manage and work in the organization and the criteria used to determine who gets ahead—just to list a few. Do not assume managers and employees will automatically adjust to the changes. Plan to assess the organizational culture for issues that may have a negative impact on the ability to retain new diverse employees. Also, identify the need for any skills-building training and provide it before the new diverse hires begin to arrive.

The good news is that taking a strategic approach to diversity recruiting has proven to be the most effective way to build recruiting efforts that transform organizations. With a SDR process, success is not just possible—it is assured.

## **About the Author**

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