

## A conversation with HPHC's Diversity Officer

### Since assuming the position of Vice President in charge of diversity, where do you think the organization has made the most progress around diversity?

One important measure of our progress is that our workforce understands that there is a strong business rationale for addressing issues related to staff and member diversity. In fact, nearly 90% of our staff agree that valuing diversity is critical to our success. Also, 78% of our employees tell us they believe that senior management is visibly demonstrating a commitment to diversity, which is good news.

### What was your original plan for HPHC's diversity initiative and how has that changed over the years?

The strategy from the outset was to create a plan to increase the awareness of diversity as a business issue and a key corporate value of the organization. Then, to implement a plan that could systematically lead us in building a diverse, inclusive and equitable organization able to respond to our diverse customers. These strategies are still intact. What was unexpected, however, has been the tremendous interest shown by other organizations, many of whom are our respected customers. So we are now collaborating with them on their diversity efforts as a value-added service.

### What is one of the most significant challenges the organization has faced over the past four years?

Discussing issues of diversity, particularly related to race, gender, class and sexual orientation can be difficult. In our diversity workshops, we create an environment for people to explore issues of discrimination and prejudice. Examining these often unacknowledged attitudes can generate strong reactions, which need to be managed with competence and sensitivity.

### What have been the most significant milestones over the past four years?

**First**, we have clearly identified diversity as one of our five strategic goals and have held all senior managers accountable for meeting diversity objectives annually.

**Second**, we have been able to recruit more minorities than at any other time in the organization's history.

**Third**, we have improved our ability to serve members with limited English proficiency. In a recent member satisfaction survey, satisfaction rates rose dramatically among members who had access to our interpreter services.

### What challenges do you expect to face in the future?

Today, employees everywhere are facing new realities at work. Downsizing, cost-containment pressures, limited advancement opportunities, job insecurity, work and family pressures and merger challenges are all part of work life. Given this, employees are more wary of their employers and are evaluating them carefully on the



competence of management and the quality of work life. They have a heightened expectation of fair processes and treatment and they look to the organization to create a meritocracy. Our challenge therefore is to ensure that we have in place practices that are humane and respectful of people's values and differences. Otherwise we will lose talent to our competitors.

### What advice beyond what you have shared would you give to those who are trying to create change around diversity in their organizations?

**Engage** leadership in your effort. Nothing is more important than commitment from the top.

Leaders must stand tall on this issue in a visible and compelling way. **Create** opportunities for employees at all levels to lead aspects of your effort, so they are personally and professionally invested in making and sustaining change.

**Be realistic.** Organizational change is evolutionary, not revolutionary. Stay focused on a few primary areas at a time. Acknowledge the small victories, because they serve as the catalyst for greater change in the future.