

Diversity a socio-economic necessity in company culture

Nothing is more quintessentially American — and democratic — than diversity. Yet we struggle to embrace it as a fundamental element of our socio-economic reality.

In a nation of immigrants with an extraordinary variety of ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, diversity is present in every fabric of the national tapestry. From the original American Indian tribes to the latest influx of Eastern European migration, our country is arguably the most diverse nation on Earth. It is a unique sociological characteristic; unfortunately, we have not yet capitalized on its enormous advantages for our society, our economic development and our political leadership in the world.

Indeed, the benefits of

promoting diversity abound, and the workplace can be a laboratory on how to profit from it. Take for example a local nonprofit

organization's approach to incorporating diversity into its company culture.

Northwest Human Services, a nonprofit agency that has been serving the needs of the community through comprehensive medical care, mental-health services and social services since 1970, has been able to thrive greatly because of its commitment to promoting diversity.

Considering the distinctive nature of the agency's clientele, it would be difficult to adequately meet the needs



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of its clients without a commitment to the values of diversity.

Thus, the agency has made a priority to hire multilingual and multicultural staff members from various cultural backgrounds, ethnicity, age groups, religion affiliations and other orientations; a practice that has improved the quality of its

services while strengthening the core values of the organization: community, cooperation, compassion and commitment.

This trend is becoming predominant at the large corporate level nationwide. Today, executives in various industries have realized the importance of becoming

more diverse, for they know the tremendous business opportunities it creates and the competitive advantage it begets. Undoubtedly, savvy business leaders have realized that the world's increasing globalization requires more than ever before interaction among people from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. But how does it apply to us, Americans, in our own homeland?

Despite the diverse nature of our culture, there seems to be a subtle and incomprehensible mistrust of multiculturalism in our society. The insidious self-serving political rhetoric in regard to making English the official language of the nation — as if it weren't decisively established yet — is one typical example of our unnecessary cultural anxiety.

The truth, however, is that the advantages of a multilingual society can garner a plethora of benefits that range from economic prosperity to intellectual and cultural refinement of the population.

Our neighbors to the north can testify to this claim as do other nations overseas. Switzerland, for instance, a wealthy country of roughly 7.5 million people, has three official languages (German, French and Italian) plus Romansh, which is a local dialect, and most of its citizens speak English, as well.

In the United States, we have an extraordinary opportunity to become an international example of diversity; even our democratic principles require that we embrace this new leadership role. Once we

overcome our cultural misconceptions, we will realize that the diversity of our society is the strongest element of our national identity.

Be it Anglo, Hispanic, African-American, Asian-American or any other ethnic, cultural or religious group that colors the canvas of our American culture, we always will be one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Let the words of the traditional Greek author Aesop (620-560 B.C.) remind us of the ultimate value of diversity: "United we stand, divided we fall."

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