



An action plan for employers

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Your most valuable customer states: "from now on, we will only do business with organizations that have effective diversity and equity programs." How will your organization respond? Can you meet this challenge? Is this customer's emphasis on equity and cultural diversity a current scenario?

"Yes"! Customers are expressing a preference to do business with companies and organizations that respect diversity. As a result, corporations are adopting equitable and culturally inclusive workplace policies. Business loyalties are shifting to organizations that reflect multicultural values. Today's corporations must address this concern in a meaningful way in order to remain competitive.

The need to be a culturally diverse workplace becomes more obvious as customers change their criteria to govern their contractual relationships. For example, the Department of Justice recommends that government departments contract their legal work to organizations that have effective employment equity programs. Is your organization able to meet this criteria? Or, will you be left behind?

Here is a checklist of steps for management to consider when adopting and implementing an effective workplace equity program. Two aspects are critical: 1) access to employment; and 2) once access occurs, how is opportunity and personal dignity fostered?

This five-step outline is intended to encourage discussion as organizations strive to develop a comprehensive, well thought out culturally inclusive action plan. Demonstrate leadership to your employees and customers – respect cultural diversity:

1. Conduct a workplace audit

- which positions exist?
- what is the demographic make-up of your employees?
- do the demographics in your workplace reflect the diversity of the community?
- do the physical aspects of your work environment create barriers?
- do the policies, or lack thereof, in your workplace create systemic barriers?
- do the attitudes in your workplace create barriers?
- what can be done to eliminate barriers?

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2. Examine your hiring and management practices

- what are the bona fide occupational requirements for each position?
- does your organization use job descriptions?
- does your organization use objective criteria and questions for the interview process?
- is the interview process gender neutral?
- are your interviewers trained to respect cultural diversity?
- are there realistic, meaningful and objective criteria for performance evaluation?
- do personnel files exist? Are they properly maintained?
- are there realistic performance goals?
- how are performance goals identified, communicated, achieved and acknowledged?
- is there an effective performance feedback process?
- are these systems sensitive to cultural differences?

3. Adopt Policies

- is there a commitment at the "top" to model and act upon equity and diversity principles?
- is there an active working group or person responsible for policy design, implementation and ongoing evaluation?
- are your policies comprehensive and culturally sensitive?
- do your employment policies and work habits accommodate diversity?
- are policies understood, communicated, and taken seriously?
- are policy advisors in place? If so, are they trained to respond appropriately to complaints?

4. Educate, Educate, Educate

- does your organization have a long-term plan to ensure that each person in the workplace understands why equity and cultural diversity issues are important?
- how is communication around racial issues and cultural values enhanced?
- does the organization commit adequate time to educational endeavors?

5. Conduct exit interviews and analyze your workplace

- does your organization know why talented people leave?
- are lifestyle, parenting and disability issues adequately addressed?
- has the organization quantified the costs associated with employee turnover?
- how do you know that you are you doing a good job of delivering a work environment that is equitable and culturally diverse?
- has a confidential workplace analysis relating to these matters been conducted by a neutral external expert?

Effective workplace diversity and equity programs translate into opportunity: both corporate and personal. Action to foster equity can generate positive, long-term, and healthy results for everyone. Commit to diversity – the effort will be worth it! Just ask your customers and employees.

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