Talent Development

For D&I Staff, Executive Leadership Council, HR Leaders and Business Partners, Resource-Group Leaders

This month, we are giving you information on how to implement successful talent-development and mentoring programs, including sponsorship, for people from underrepresented groups. We include best practices from DiversityInc Top 50 companies with demonstrable results in management promotions and retention.

Our research shows a key correlation between three initiatives—mentoring/sponsorship, employee resource groups and executive diversity councils that set human-capital goals and hold managers responsible for results— and diversity in management demographics. For more details on these initiatives and case studies from companies doing this well, see our Web Seminars on Mentoring and Sponsorship with CVS Health and Accenture and on Talent Development with Time Warner and Deloitte.

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I MENTORING/SPONSORSHIP

The most important aspects of a successful mentoring program are that it be formal and cross-cultural, that mentors and mentees be given cultural-competence training, and that there be checkpoints and metrics to assess success. Mentoring is absolutely key to retention of high-potentials from underrepresented groups, according to DiversityInc Top 50 data and interviews with several companies.

- **Formal vs. Informal:** All of the DiversityInc Top 50 companies now have formal mentoring (compared with 72 percent in 2005). They have learned that informal mentoring can't be controlled and can lead to employees' getting the wrong messages from disgruntled mentors. Formal mentoring means the company assigns and monitors pairs, creating cross-cultural (by race, ethnicity, gender, orientation and disability) pairings as much as possible to ensure bidirectional learning. It's also important to reach the maximum number of managers so the program has significant impact.
- **Cultural-Competence Training:** If mentors and mentees aren't aware of pitfalls, as demonstrated in our popular Things NOT to Say series, they can inadvertently offend each other and torpedo the relationship. For specific ideas on best ways to mentor women, see Women Execs: What Was Your Best Mentoring Advice?
- **Checkpoints and Metrics:** Without metrics to assess success, your organization has no way to understand what is working and what is not or to make the case for more resources for the initiative. The most successful metrics are engagement, retention and promotions compared with those not participating in the program, broken down by race, ethnicity and gender.
- **Sponsorship:** While you can't assign protégés, companies increasingly are mandating that their senior executives must sponsor at least one high-potential from an underrepresented group, and linking that to the executive's compensation.

Discussion Questions for Staff

» **What percentage of your managers is your mentoring program reaching? Are you able to include virtual mentoring to reach managers in remote locations?**
Assess whether your program has maximum impact or is just affecting a few people. If you have limited mentees, are you ensuring that those who are not invited to participate remain engaged?

» **How are you ensuring as many cross-cultural pairings as possible? What types of cultural-competence training are you offering mentors and mentees? What is your process if a mentor or mentee relationship isn't working out?**
Examine the racial/gender breakdown of your pairings and whether there is sufficient mix. Also factor in orientation and disability if possible. Assess the type of training you are offering and whether it is effectively eliminating cultural barriers. Examine the engagement, retention and promotion rates of mentees versus those who have not participated and share the results with senior management.

» **Have you considered sponsorship? If so, how are you encouraging your senior executives to find cross-cultural protégés?**
Do your executives understand the difference between mentors and sponsors? Are you exposing them to high-potentials from underrepresented groups? Are you giving them a toolkit or guidelines on effective sponsorship as well as cultural-competence training?

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II EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS

Almost all DiversityInc Top 50 companies use their resource groups to identify talent (externally and internally) and help develop leaders. The groups themselves offer a tremendous opportunity to cross-train people with new skills as well as to give them chances to work with other business units and have exposure to senior leadership, often through the executive sponsors.

The selection process for group leaders is important and should involve HR as well as the individual's manager (to get buy-in). It is very difficult for employees to succeed as resource-group leaders unless they have support from their supervisors and are given sufficient workday time. Data correlations and interviews with leading companies show value in linking the employee's performance as resource-group leader to performance reviews. For more information, see our recent Meeting in a Box on Employee Resource Groups.

Discussion Questions for Staff

» **How do you select your employee-resource-group leaders? Does HR have a role? Are you limiting the group leadership to people who have already demonstrated leadership within the organization?**
Employee-resource-group leadership is critical to talent development. Having employee-resource-group leaders meet periodically (four times a year is most common) with the CEO and senior team allows group leaders to develop confidence and contribute at a higher level. For best practices on using groups for diversity recruitment, see 5 Reasons These Companies Hire 50% More Blacks, Latinos and Asians.

» **Are you using your groups to help recruit new talent? Do they attend job fairs at colleges and professional organizations? Do they help on-board new employees?**
Employee resource groups have proved invaluable at helping to engage new employees and make them comfortable in the corporate environment. They also help acculturate families and improve retention rates. See this video on how AT&T uses employee resource groups to on-board new employees.

» **Do you use your employee resource groups to have frank discussions about "elephant in the room" topics, including racism, sexism and homophobia, which could impede retention and talent development?**
It is very important, especially in these times, to be open about different views and to ensure top leadership makes it clear that your corporate culture is inclusive in every way. For best practices on this, see Frank Office Talk About Race—How ERGs Can Help.

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III EXECUTIVE DIVERSITY COUNCIL

To succeed at talent development, an organization needs business goals that are established and supported by senior executives. In the case of D&I initiatives, DiversityInc Top 50 companies increasingly set council goals to increase employee-resource-group and formal-mentoring participation as well as to increase the diversity of managers and those in the pipeline to executive roles. Council members' compensation is frequently tied to those goals being reached on an organizational and business-unit level.

Without accountability factors, set by an executive diversity council, organizations often treat diversity goals as "soft" and "the right thing to do" instead of as valuable ways to improve the business. At 54 percent of the DiversityInc Top 50, the CEOs chair those councils, sending the message that the business imperative for diversity comes from the top.

For more information on Executive Diversity Councils, see our Web Seminar with Wyndham Worldwide, Cox Communications and Toyota.

Discussion Questions for Staff

» **Do you have an executive diversity council? If so, is it chaired by your CEO?**
How involved are your senior executives with your diversity initiatives? What kind of exposure do they have to high-potentials from underrepresented groups?

» **Does your council set human-capital goals?**
If so, is executive compensation linked to those goals? How else are your executives evaluated on talent-development goals? If they are mentors or employee-resource-group sponsors, are they accountable for mentees' and groups' success?

NEXT MONTH

Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month for all employees and Global Diversity for D&I staff, global HR, talent-acquisition and communications staff, employee-resource-group leaders and diversity-council members.

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