



Diversity Executive

Features

I Don't Have Time for Diversity

Joe Santana, 11-13-2011

Imagine it's noon on a Wednesday, and a company's guest speaker, a diversity and inclusion consultant, waits for meeting participants to arrive. She watches as 50 participants, who appeared to be rushing to put their names on the sign-in sheets, stiffly take their seats. There is a sense of tension. She is later shocked to learn many of these participants have been told by managers and supervisors they can take no more than 30 to 40 minutes for diversity and employee resource group meetings out of their own lunch hours, and then they need to be back working. This is surprising since the organization has a new CEO who is visibly supportive of diversity and inclusion, and who gets how it impacts the business.

This tale is based on a true story related by Sahar Andrade, diversity and social media strategist for Sahar Consulting LLC, and she said it's not uncommon. At almost every employee resource group convention or event she attends, Andrade said there are pockets of people huddled together talking about how supportive their CEO is of diversity and inclusion, how passionate employees are about it, but how they lack managers and supervisors who support their participation in diversity and inclusion activities.

The Manager-Engagement Disconnect

Having CEOs and top executives support any diversity and inclusion initiative is important, but managers and supervisors are equally important. Good CEOs inspire people and enlist them in a common cause that shapes an organization's culture and direction. Managers and supervisors, however, control the implementation, making aspirations real all the way down the organizational ladder — or not. They organize people and resources, enact plan elements and follow through to turn CEO visions into reality, as business coach Gary Weigh states in his June 30, 2010, blog post "Leaders and Managers."

"In organizations where the CEO and other top leaders support a vision of a diverse

and inclusive culture, but where managers don't see the connection to their function and therefore do not feel compelled by business requirements to behave in a way that implements this vision for their teams, the company is simply not going to move from high-level aspiration into the realm of reality that penetrates every corner of their environment," Andrade said.

Given the crucial role managers and supervisors play in realizing diversity and inclusion within their environments, it's important to ask why they don't want to actively participate. There are many themes that drive the disconnect between passionate, visionary leadership and grudging, ineffective or nonexistent managerial action. Here are a few:

1. In some cases, even the most well-intentioned and supportive managers and supervisors don't see their departmental needs and objectives addressed by the high-level diversity and inclusion value proposition. "Managers and supervisors are usually driven more by specific functional needs and objectives than the overarching company objective," said Robert Rodriguez, senior vice president of the Association of Latino Professionals in Finance and Accounting and author of *Latino Talent*.

For instance, Andrade said procurement professionals tend to focus on cost savings, while operation managers focus on service delivery timeliness and quality. "Unless they see a direct correlation between doing something or supporting a particular diversity and inclusion effort and how that impacts areas where they are being measured, you do not have their attention, despite a clear message about the greater good for the overall company," she said. So while these managers may think diversity and inclusion are good and important, they may not see how their team members' participation helps them to become more effective in achieving local goals. They hear the statements about diversity and inclusion offering competitive advantage to the company, but they walk away thinking, to paraphrase John Donne, for whom do these bells toll?

2. Something else that may block some managers and supervisors from seeing how diversity impacts their function, and how they can and should contribute, is when they hear diversity and inclusion, they may immediately think of it in terms of being tolerant of minorities or women. Essentially, they only hear a message about hiring fairly, political correctness and making everyone feel good. "As intelligent and caring people, they may understand this, but when wearing their functional leadership hat, this overriding definition in their head does not explain how these efforts can and should play a role in their functional effectiveness where they are paid to produce specific results," Rodriguez said.

3. Finally, there is a lack of trickle-down into managers' and supervisors' performance objectives that require specific diversity and inclusion actions. As a result, they do not hear a specific call for any action on their part. "There is a lack of alignment and consistency between the diversity and inclusion message and request for action and the things being measured as part of performance

assessment,” said Janice Ellig, Co-CEO at NYC-based executive search firm Chadick Ellig. “Most company objectives that get attention top-down are those that are cascaded as actionable behaviors by each relevant layer of the organization.”

Procurement cannot pull all the levers to increase profitability, but it can contribute by consolidating vendors and reducing costs. These actions are spelled out and made requirements. Likewise, no discrete organizational function can drive achievement of diversity and inclusion goals alone, but each can contribute.

What Can Diversity Leaders Do?

Here are a few steps diversity leaders can take to engage managers and supervisors:

1. Explicitly convey that diversity and inclusion are about managerial/supervisory competency, not tolerance or benevolence toward others. “Clearly defining in the top-level diversity and inclusion message that this is in part an effort to develop competencies in leaders and managers that enable them to more effectively manage and supervise everyone on their teams for the highest performance is an important start,” Rodriguez said. He said whenever he’s training managers and supervisors, his first job is to ensure they understand it’s not about tolerating others and being nice, but about effectively managing performance in a world where their teams are increasingly diverse. It’s important for diversity leaders to work with their training organization to ensure managers and supervisors are taught how to understand and effectively manage the variety of individuals who make up their teams — female, male, gay, straight, black, white, Hispanic, Gen Y, boomers, born abroad or multi-lingual.

2. Explain what’s in it for them. Diversity leaders should not assume that because managers and supervisors are “smart people,” they will automatically see a connection between the high-level aspiration/vision presented by senior leaders and their day-to-day activities and goals. Rodriguez advises diversity and inclusion practitioners “not to forget to communicate the need for direct action from managers and supervisors when creating or reworking the diversity and inclusion value propositions for the organization.”

Andrade said to look at all key function objectives, as well as the overall business, to determine where specific focus areas converge and diverge to create value propositions that clearly call to action and resonate with the various audiences that make up a company, including the managers and supervisors. They need to be overtly and explicitly told how putting these skills to work will help them meet department objectives.

One way to do this is to provide examples of managers and supervisors who have acquired diversity competency or increased their level of engagement and got or are getting more out of their team members and their team members’ networks as a result. Learning, for example, how a sales manager in another part of the organization who has managerial diversity and inclusion competency has effectively

doubled his revenue production is a great way to motivate other sales managers to see why it's important to them. Andrade said diversity leaders must "find a way to show managers and supervisors how mastering diversity and inclusion skills will help [them] get the most output and effectiveness out of all their job-related people-relationships."

3. Work with HR and leadership to build return on diversity into managers' and supervisors' performance expectations/requirements. Ellig said what gets measured gets done, and return on diversity should be part of what needs to be measured from the top of the organization to the bottom. "This does not necessarily mean that everyone's performance review will say something like, 'needs to increase diversity of team.' It does, however mean that actionable elements of diversity and inclusion can and should make their way into all management and supervisor reviews," she said.

For example, "encourage increased collaboration across departments that results in a 6 percent increase in operational efficiency," is in part a diversity and inclusion management goal. So is "having junior staff reverse-mentor senior team members on working effectively with Gen Y to increase Gen Y engagement by 20 percent." Another might be, "increase team members' participation in company networking groups by 15 percent to increase cross-departmental efficiencies." While these goals are not about hiring or retaining people from any specific group, they set targets and measures around managers' and supervisors' diversity and inclusion competencies. The results of meeting or failing to meet these diversity and inclusion related objectives should be in alignment to how the organization responds to meeting or failure to meet other important performance goals. That communicates that these are important.

Managers and supervisors are crucial to transform diversity and inclusion from vision to practical reality within an organization. Therefore, diversity leaders always must ensure they are properly engaged and aligned. Diversity leaders should never take understanding of what can and needs to be done, or the engagement of managers and supervisors, for granted simply because the CEO and senior team vocally support diversity and inclusion.

When we engage leaders, we have a strong positive vision. When we engage the people, we have passion and readiness to act. But it's only when we engage managers and supervisors — the organizers of people and resources — that leaders' aspirations for return on diversity, combined with people's passion, will sweep through the day-to-day reality of a company at full strength.

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