



ways to retain
DIVERSE
TALENT

Being outside the predominant group can be difficult, and the challenges minority employees face often contribute to high turnover rates. But there are several cost-effective tactics talent leaders can use to help keep diverse workers.

By Rosalind Sago and Lindy Williams

One-third of the workforce is made up of people of color, half are women, an estimated 6 percent are gay or transgender and 11 percent live with disabilities, according to "The State of Diversity in Today's Workforce," a report by the Center for American Progress. This is the talent that will build the future.

Talent includes every employee, as each offers a unique perspective, and each one deserves to be treated as an individual. Historically some groups have been disenfranchised, but organizations that have a long-term view recognize that success means honoring workforce diversity and providing multiple ways for individual talent to emerge.

Consider the following three employee archetypes. Carlos loves to solve complex problems but isn't sufficiently challenged in his current role. Kate is a new mom. She is capable and bright, but she is having reservations about returning when her maternity leave ends. Mohammad is a bit mysterious and doesn't like to ask questions. These employees have skills, motivations and aspirations a manager could miss if they are only viewed as diverse talent.

Leaders embrace every member of a team and help each employee discover meaningful work that engages and enriches. Those who ignore this opportunity miss critical yet simple opportunities to grow a team and prepare an organization for the future.

Here are five ways managers can engage, inspire and lead a diverse and high-performing workforce:

1. Identify Skills, Interests and Values

Managers who learn as much as possible about each person on the team will know who the best players are for tasks and what special skills and abilities they can offer. Savvy managers are curious. They want to know what inspires every team member, and they know that repetitious activities get stale.

Talent leaders learn to recognize passions and interests. An individual's interest in a project or task can make a big difference in his or her performance level and the quality of the end result. Managers who notice what sparks interest, not simply where an individual excels, can tap into the discretionary effort each employee has stored away. Further, those who ask questions and listen carefully gain insights into employee talents that may be hiding. These insights fuel innovation, increase productivity and grow corporate capability.

For instance, a conversation with Carlos can help him understand how being Latino can be an asset to the organization. It could also unleash problem-solving skills he gained while adjusting to a new environment as the only English as second language student in his school. These skills could be applied in the organization's team building, negotiating and collaboration efforts.

2. Build Reputation Awareness

Reputations can make or break a career. A personal brand is a well-managed reputation. Managers can help diverse staff members understand and manage their brands within a department and across the organization. Guiding individuals to develop and promote their



On the Web

Gloria Castillo, president of Chicago United, talks about how diverse, culturally flexible leaders help prepare organizations for the future: diversity-executive.com/materials/view/12/.

personal brands — which represent their unique strengths and accomplishments — will honor their differences as an integral part of the organization.

Talent leaders should regularly encourage employees to seek feedback from colleagues and peers about their personal brands to see if perceptions match the brand they hope to build and protect.

People who are diverse compared to the organizational mainstream are sometimes quite protective of their identities, feeling a need to assimilate. This results in only a portion of the person showing up each day. As a result, they are often hidden from those who can help propel their careers and provide visibility.

Leaders who regularly offer feedback on reputation and brand provide a realistic perspective on employees' strengths and guidance to improve image and performance. Managers may hesitate to tell the truth because they think employees can't handle it. But they want the truth, they need it and are disappointed when they don't get it. Managers who are truth-tellers are instrumental in helping employees overcome challenging perceptions and biases that may hinder their progress.

Traits of a Successful Talent Manager

A manager skilled at retaining diverse talent will be:

- » Curious about who these employees are and what they have to offer.
- » Truthful about employees' brand image and how to strengthen it.
- » Future focused, and provide information on the organization to increase cultural competence in diverse talent.
- » Flexible, and move beyond perceived and actual limitations to embrace all possibilities.
- » Inspiring, to encourage action and execution on plans that will keep diverse employees engaged, advancing in their careers and development, and contributing to organizational objectives.

— Rosalind Sago and Lindy Williams

Managers who avoid conversations because backgrounds, experiences, skin color or preferences differ short-change themselves, the individuals and the organization. Feedback offers opportunities to show how important the employee is to the organization, help him or her leverage strengths, close gaps and avoid derailment.

Remember Mohammad? New to the organization, he has terrific ideas and was excited about joining the company, but there is a lot to learn. He is a fast learner, but he believes asking questions is a sign of weakness. Colleagues are becoming annoyed that he seems to disrespect their knowledge and to reject their attempts to help him. A talent leader who creates a dialogue with Mohammad can help him articulate cultural

nuances in his behavior to his teammates and find ways to build mutually rewarding relationships.

3. Uncover Cultural Expectations

Organizations are more complex than ever, and people in the know have difficulty navigating internal environments, let alone someone who feels he or she is on the outside looking in. Trying to decipher corporate politics and cultural norms can be daunting. Managers play a critical role in sharing behavioral expectations, unwritten rules and what can get someone into hot water. This information is important to all employees, but essential to those who come from different environments or have limited exposure.

Often managers think employees know or should know the rules of conduct and what's acceptable within an organization. However, this may not be communicated until someone steps outside the boundaries of acceptability. When this happens, someone with a diverse background can feel shut out, tricked or misled. Managers can help by discussing the informal rules and expectations, by sharing their knowledge about the organization's culture, how it may be shifting and by letting employees know where and how to find answers when things seem confusing.

Consider Kate, who loves her new role as a mom but wants to continue to progress professionally. She believes there are barriers for new mothers returning to the workplace and fears she is no longer a viable candidate for promotions. Her manager can dialogue with her to learn how she views the landscape of opportunities, discover why she believes the road to promotions will be tough, and help her explore whether these perceived barriers are brick walls, glass ceilings or rubber fences.

4. Seek to Advance Mobility

Managers should encourage and coach employees to explore the widest array of options possible and avoid personal stereotypes or biases that may limit an employee's options. Talent leaders can build conversations around six possible directions for growth. All reward the employee as well as the organization:

- **Move up:** Organizations need diversity to build a future workforce that reflects and understands the changing marketplace.
- **Move across:** Organizations need people who know multiple aspects of the business.
- **Grow in place:** Organizations can increase engagement and commitment by growing internal talent and utilizing more of their abilities in current roles.
- **Move around:** Organizations need employees to find their best fit. Trying out roles or assignments for short periods of time or on a temporary basis can help.
- **Take a step back:** Organizations need individuals to be able to integrate their work and personal lives. Allowing individuals to step back or down may bring needed balance. There could be informal career paths that involve steps back but that can change specialties or disciplines to achieve desired career aspirations.

- **Move out:** Organizations need to retain talent to be successful; however, some individuals will need to move on if there is no fit within the company.

R. Roosevelt Thomas Jr., author of "Beyond Race and Gender," redefined diversity with this fundamental guiding principle: true diversity management is helping all people reach their true potential. When a manager guides employees toward their career aspirations by exploring multiple options, not just the obvious ones, a higher level of engagement can result as the employees see, seek and seize the right ones for themselves and the organization.

5. Initiate Conversations to Guide Action Planning

Talent leaders should coach and advocate for diverse talent, and encourage them to move beyond goal setting to taking action. Managers who help employees create extensive professional networks accelerate development by connecting them with people who can support their plans, provide a broader understanding of the organization and potentially facilitate career advancement.

While the professional network can help, managers should commit their plans and ideas to support diverse employees in writing. Laying out deadlines, steps and contingency plans on paper helps clarify ideas for the manager.

One impediment to action planning is the distraction of the daily workload. Today it is rare to see any employee with time on his or her hands. To avoid this pitfall, build learning into the job. Managers can look at individuals' current work and make time to debrief projects and assignments — What did you learn? What was difficult? What would you change? — and fold these activities into the workday. Similarly, debriefing after short-term stretch assignments can help to close learning gaps and support action steps.

Great talent leaders take the time and make the effort to support all talent, and it's not complicated. «

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At PNC, Talent Engagement, Retention Begin and End With Culture

By Sharon Brunecz

Retaining diverse talent can be a challenge. To address it, financial services organization PNC, the author's firm, focuses on its culture and incorporates diversity and inclusion into every aspect of business. Employee business resource groups, or EBRGs, diversity councils, training and other resources allow the company to strengthen its culture and better engage diverse talent.

For instance, to attract, hire and retain military veterans, whose critical thinking and leadership skills are considered incredibly valuable, PNC works with veterans, translating their military skills and background into civilian roles to ensure they are placed in the most appropriate positions and lines of business.

Military EBRG members serve as advocates and liaisons for military candidates throughout the recruiting, hiring and onboarding process. Once candidates are hired, they have access to a number of internal resources tailored to them and their families, including the Military EBRG, training and development, services and benefits, including a pension plan.

"Understanding differences between military and civilian lifestyles and aspirations allows us to create a culture that supports veterans' transitions into the civilian workplace," said Amanda Snow, vice president and diversity strategist for PNC talent acquisition. "By providing networking and professional development opportunities and ensuring veterans are in roles that best utilize their skills, we increase employee engagement and retention."

In addition to its Military EBRG, PNC's African-American; Asian-American; Disability Awareness; Emerging Professionals; Latino; Multicultural; Women; and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender EBRGs support employees with a shared heritage, gender or other background, and provide opportunities for professional development. Members network internally and have opportunities to attend and occasionally speak at community events.

"PNC's EBRGs reflect an increasingly significant percentage of our employees," said Marsha Jones, executive vice president and chief diversity officer at PNC. "These groups foster inclusion by providing a forum in which employees can connect with one another and senior business leaders to network, share ideas and contribute to the company's business success."

PNC's diversity councils, which help advance diversity and inclusion initiatives in individual lines of business, also strengthen its culture. Their efforts, along with senior-level executive support, translate into more diverse hiring practices, a workplace where different opinions and perspectives are valued and greater employee retention.

PNC's diversity recruiting team also supports corporate and business-specific diversity and inclusion initiatives and objectives. The team builds and maintains strong relationships with internal stakeholders and external community-based organizations to ensure the company attracts and hires top diverse talent. Its external relationships provide employees with networking opportunities and increase awareness of PNC within diverse communities.

According to Gallup, PNC's employee engagement score has increased by 17 points since 2010. The number of engaged employees has increased by 8 percent, while those who are disengaged have decreased by 3 percent.

Retaining diverse talent is a challenge, but PNC's approach to diversity is yielding higher levels of engagement, which the company expects will continue to impact retention in a sustainable manner.

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