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External Talent: Why do Minorities and Women Leave in The First Year?

by Greg Roper, PhD

You are the staffing manager and you have spent countless hours and energy trying to fill

key positions in your organization. Your charge has been to actively seek out minorities and women for different positions in the hopes of increasing the diversity within the organization. You have accomplished your tasks and everything seems okay. Your candidate gets on board, things seem to be going well and all of the sudden you receive a message that your candidate has resigned from the organization. You wonder why?

There are numerous reasons why minorities and women depart organizations in the first year of their assimilation into the organization. The purpose of this paper is to examine three critical issues associated with minorities and women departing: stereotypes, discrimination, and unsupported workplace, understanding that these issues are not all inclusive.

Stereotypes

Stereotypes are fact and anecdotal from a historical perspective of America. United States history is full of stories of racial strife, slavery, bigotry, prejudice, discrimination, etc. An example of a stereotype is one concerning whites as suggested by (Cose, 1991, Sigall and Page, 1971). The stereotype about whites is that they are viewed as more positive and the view of minorities as being negative than those of whites are. While viewing the stereotypes of minorities, specifically Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics, Smith (1990) suggested that the view of whites as it pertains to the level of intelligence of minorities, view them as less intelligent and have a poor work ethic. Morrison (1992) found that, "Asian-Americans are assumed to be research oriented and not able to supervise people; Hispanics are assumed to be unassertive; and African Americans are perceived as being lazy and incompetent (p. 35)."

According to (Harvey and Allard, 2005), the media continues to perpetuate stereotypes through the mass media to shape our culture and subculture. While continuing this practice of polarization through stereotyping, this belief system about minorities is further cemented into the cognitive structures of those very members who are part of the organization. The constant negative portrayal of minorities and women is key to recognize, because the mass media determines who the information is transmitted too and what information is communicated. In other words, what is viewed in the mass media is selective in nature.

The question, which cannot be answered in the article, is how do you change years of stereotypes in today's workplace? This will be an overarching issue in organizations for years to come, because those individuals who are part of the organization are a microcosm of society. These individuals are attuned to the influences of mass media; therefore, it may reinforce belief systems, attitudes, and perceptions. Thus, the vicious cycle of stereotyping continues inside and outside organizations.

Discrimination

What can you say about discrimination that has not already been said? A national study conducted by the Families and Work Institute in 1993 (Gainsay et al) indicated that what minorities and women intrinsically know and experience is true, discrimination still exists in the workplace. It is a tough reality of the business world and even though organizations have made conscience efforts to eradicate themselves of such practices, it still exists today.

To illustrate this point, let's look at the Coca-Cola case of 1998 and how discrimination against African-American employees regarding promotions, work assignments, etc. was neglected. According to one of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit filed against Coca-Cola, Greg Clark, he said the following, "that he would never have sued had he felt that his concerns were taken seriously: 'They ignored me, ignored me, ignored me, to the point where I felt that I had no other recourse'" (Harrington, 2000, p.188). The result was a record settlement against Coca-Cola for $192.5 million. As you can see, not resolving issues of discrimination can be catastrophic.

Unsupportive Work Environment

One of the greatest challenges for minorities and women is being granted access to resources, knowledge, and support to complete their roles in the organization. It is common knowledge that minorities and women are treated differently than white males, often in subtle forms such as not being asked to social events, excluded from lunch, or not being given the timely and appropriate information to make informed decisions Morrison (1992).

Minorities and women intrinsically understand the pressures of being members of an organization. That pressure is often self-imposed, because stereotypes about minorities and women drives these groups to work twice as hard as their white male counterparts. Why? The answer is simple. Minorities and women have been viewed as not being competent enough, skilled, knowledgeable, or have the intellect to complete complex tasks. As the complexity of the tasks increase, the perception is that minorities and women are less likely to handle the pressures of such complexity in their jobs. Thereby, creating an umbrella of uncertainty, intense scrutiny, higher expectations for minorities and women, the unwillingness to reach out for assistance so as to not be seen as incompetent, and the need for perfection. Often times this can lead to detrimental consequences for women and minorities (Morrison, 1992;Wentling, 1992)

Strategies to Retain Minorities and Women

As described in the previous discussion, minorities and women face a great many obstacles that may not be faced by other members of the workforce. Not that these obstacles can't be over come through hard work, perseverance, education, and time but the issue is how to control the turnover of minorities and women who leave the organization within one year. These strategies below are not exhaustive, but they provide a framework for further development for retention strategies in organizations.

- **Support from senior leadership**. No change effort such as retention of minorities and women is going to be successful usually has to have buy-in from senior management. The case has to be made as to why retention is important to the business, cost, advantage of having strong retention among minorities and women, and how these strategies are going to benefit the company in the end.

- **Career development track**. As minorities and women enter the organization in a defined job, they need to be on a career track as an incentive to remain with the organization. The program should be designed to encourage and support the professional growth of minorities and women up the corporate ladder.

- **Mentoring Program**. In order for minorities and women to be successful in their careers with a new organization, they need the benefit of mentorship. These individuals provide guidance, coaching, counseling, etc. These programs can be formal or informal, because there is a strong correlation between a strong mentorship program for minorities and women, which provide the foundation for success in the organization.

- **Linking Talent and Business Objectives**. First, this requires the organization to have a clear and defined business strategy. Second, the organization must target positions that are critical to the organization achieving its business goal and objectives. Third, is to monitor the growth of the business and have annual "talent assessment". The goal of talent assessment is to take a proactive approach to managing your" high potential" individuals, which include minorities and women to meet the needs of the business (Branham, 2005).

Where do we go from here?

It is evident that minorities and women still have a difficult road to navigate and one that will take a great deal of time and effort for organizations to fully embrace. The challenge for organizations is to create a culture of change, where obstacles to success for newly hired minorities and women are not part of the problem, but those of a viable solution. 160;As the competitiveness of the U.S. continues to grow, the only way to maintain a competitive advantage is through human and organizational resources (Barney, 1991; Lado, Boyd & Wright, 1992). Therefore, by providing the organization with the best available minority and women talent and retaining this talent, can the organization realize higher productivity, contribution to reducing cost, lower absenteeism, lower turnover, and the efforts of minorities and women will provide innovation and superior job performance, because your organization took the right steps to retain these individuals (Wright, 1987; Wright, Pringle, and; Kroll, 1994)

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