



Larry E. Davis

Ralph Bangs and Larry E. Davis. Mentoring programs can build diversity in management.

Approximately one of three Americans is now a person of color, that is, African-American, Hispanic or Asian. Despite this fact, managers who are members of one of these minority groups continue to be hard to find in corporate America. In fact, it is safe to say they are rare.

For example, in firms with 100 or more employees, only 5 percent of the managers are African American, 3 percent are Hispanic and 3 percent are Asian. Clearly the shares of managerial jobs held by America's three largest minority groups are much lower than their share of the country's total population.

As noted in the recent report "Inclusion in the Workforce" produced by Sustainable Pittsburgh, this is not a good thing for our region. The advantages of having a racially diverse work force reflective of the region are many: greater per capita economic growth, greater regional attractiveness to young professionals, stronger communities by reducing unemployment and enhanced workforce availability to businesses in the region.

The scarcity of minority managers is not a problem that is unique to our region, but is a problem experienced nationally. To obtain and sustain a diverse workforce is not as easy as it might seem, and doing so at the corporate level will require that our region both think and work smart.

Last month the Center on Race and Social Problems, with funding from the Pittsburgh Foundation, held a summer institute, the goal of which was to

promote strategies to increase corporate diversity. Presentations were given by three national experts: Frank Dobbin from Harvard, Emilio Castilla from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Audrey Murrell from the University of Pittsburgh. Each of these scholars helped our understanding of both what is known to work and what has proven less effective in the past.

Let us begin with a brief review of what has proven not to be so successful in the past. We do this not to "rub it in" to those who still engage largely in these practices but to inform those who are considering new initiatives about what has worked.

By far the most common method used by corporations to increase the ranks of minority managers has been to institute diversity training programs -- that is to teach people about differences and how to "get along better with others who are different." These methods have produced small gains but been largely ineffectual, as attitudinal biases are hard to change.

Social networking efforts also have been used with great frequency. Employers in such instances have supported the establishment of affinity groups. The obvious problem with such a strategy for under-represented groups such as African Americans is that affinity groups are typically composed of same-race and same-gender individuals. Hence, if the problem is the shortage of a particular group in the profession, asking them to form groups is unlikely to bring many savvy members together who can be helpful to one another.

The establishment of a task force, council or diversity manager responsible for increasing the number of minority managers was an approach that resulted in significant success. It seems that having a group or individual to personally invest in this effort and to be in some way responsible for progress results in positive outcomes. Here the result may be a function of the old research adage "that which gets monitored gets improved."

However, mentoring programs that paired minority managers up with seasoned managers were far and away the most successful strategy to improve the numbers of Hispanics, Asians and African-American corporate managers. Each of our experts and their research data supported the employment of a mentoring strategy.

This should come as no surprise once we think about it, as much of what we learn that is really important we do so informally and by seeing someone actually do whatever it is we need to learn. Again, perhaps not surprising,

mentees are more likely to be promoted, earn more money, have a career plan and be more likely to remain with the corporation.

Research evidence provided by our speakers seems to confirm what we see in other areas of addressing social problems, whether it be fathering or teaching or a multitude of other roles: It is difficult to be that which one has never seen.

Hence the more training of minority managers that provides real contact to see and discuss a particular job, the better they are likely to do it well and the more likely they are to continue to do it in their present place of employment.

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