

Board Diversity: You Need It—Here’s How to Get It

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In our business lives we frequently see the value of increasing diversity within our work groups and at the board level. Most if not all of us recognize this value and try to achieve the goal, but we may run out of ideas or energy. It takes a conscious and sustained focus to overcome past predilections and practices. In this article, we give you practical suggestions for making tangible improvements in your board’s (and as a byproduct your organization’s) diversity and building a process to continue seeking such diversity.

What Does “Diversity” Mean?

When thinking about diversity, think expansively. Diversity can mean other things in addition to race and sex, including socio-economic class, education, gender identity, geographic location, national origin, and disability, among other things.

What Can Diversity Bring Us?

The more and different types of people at the table, the more different and rich the ideas and perspectives become. Collaborating with a diverse group brings different views into the mix and can spur non-diverse board members to stretch beyond their comfort zone, which is sometimes just based on the inertia of tradition.

Two different people can often see the same issue through a different lens, and that broader approach will typically yield a better outcome or work product.

In addition, having a board that is reflective of the community it serves makes logical sense. For example, a board member of a particular race, ethnicity, or sex will typically be better suited to understanding what type of advertising would reach the board member’s relevant community.

Having a board that is reflective of the individuals in the organization it serves can also inspire future leaders to come forward.

Who Plays a Role?

Everyone on the board plays an important role in diversity and inclusion: from the individual who brings a diverse perspective, to sponsors and mentors along the way.

Pairing new board members with mentors can serve to create deep and lasting bonds that will benefit both individuals and by extension the organizations in which they serve. Mentors can also act as “translators,” who can assist newcomers by sharing their experience and explaining the ropes.

How to Get There

Existing board members should lead the way by setting up their board search committees to be as diverse as possible and not relying on the same small circle of candidates. Challenge the status quo and take another look at current processes that are in place to see if those processes are helping or hindering diversity.

HR recruiters should also be focused on diversity, especially for leadership roles—diversity within the organization will spur diversity on the board and each one will magnify the other.

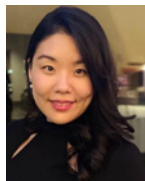
Conclusion

Health care is transforming and can no longer be considered a local business as more and more large multi-state health care systems are formed. Having more people at the table to make decisions and bring different ideas generates more new ideas and creative energy. Such decision making will assist an organization in staying relevant in a diverse and dynamic industry.

In addition, diversity is simply a good business decision—boards should represent the community in order to offer the best value and to better serve the community.

Diversity also assists in employee recruitment and retention. Diversity in leadership and the board will set the tone, and the positive example will trickle down to the employees of the organization.

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