

Advancing Women and Minorities in Leadership



It's strange to think that only eight years ago some hopeful if mistaken critics imagined we were in a post-race society. As if in response to the optimism, the country still faces racial violence and discrimination in the workplace. And, in the midst of an unprecedented presidential campaign year, one in which long-festered national issues about race and gender have once again grabbed nearly everyone's attention, no one can ignore what's never disappeared—bias and the need for change.

The challenge to the most informed and insightful executive leaders in such transitional times, when real constitutional challenges to civil rights are both viral and virulent, is to recognize societal assumptions and to work to exceed federally mandated expectations in the workplace with the aim of advancing women and minorities.

The diversity challenge begins with awareness and training, but awareness isn't universal. Studies show that men, for example, are far less cognizant of sexual harassment in the workplace, and male CEOs hire fewer women in leadership positions. Similarly, if one has never suffered discrimination, in hiring or otherwise, it may be difficult for some to see.

Executive leadership must set the tone with deliberate action.

“It's time for our CEOs and boards to exercise leadership by translating good intentions into concrete results. Addressing diversity and inclusion cannot wait until the economy fully recovers, until the budget is balanced, or until all of the other issues that are traditionally prioritized above an organization's “people focus” have been addressed.” Michael Watson Senior Vice President, Human Resources and Diversity Girl Scouts of the USA <http://commongoodcareers.org/diversityreport.pdf>

Definitions and Misconceptions

Let's begin with definitions of what constitutes discrimination under the law since many either never knew, or assume it no longer exists.

By US law, employers cannot discriminate against individuals on the basis of race, gender, pregnancy, national origin, religion, disability, citizenship status, genetic information, or age. Diversity can be seen as the inclusion of a variety of people across these categories.

- Gender discrimination involves treating someone (an applicant or employee) unfavorably because of that person's gender.
- Race discrimination involves treating someone (an applicant or employee) unfavorably because he/she is of a certain race or because of personal characteristics associated with race (such as hair texture, skin color, or certain facial features). Color discrimination involves treating someone unfavorably because of skin color complexion.
- Race/color discrimination also can involve treating someone unfavorably because the person is married to (or associated with) a person of a certain race or color.

Discrimination can occur when the victim and the person who inflicted the discrimination are the same race or color. Discrimination against an individual because of gender identity, including transgender status, or because of sexual orientation is discrimination because of sex in violation of Title VII.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects individuals against employment discrimination on the basis of race and color.

It is unlawful to discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of his/her race or color in regard to hiring, termination, promotion, compensation, job training, or any other term, condition, or privilege of employment. Title VII also prohibits employment decisions based on stereotypes and assumptions about abilities, traits, or the performance of individuals of certain racial groups. Title VII prohibits both intentional discrimination and neutral job policies that disproportionately exclude minorities and that are not job related."

(<https://www.eeoc.gov/>)

Gap Years

It should surprise no one in 2016 that leadership and wage gaps between genders persist across public and private sectors. The White House published a report on discrepancies in pay scales and

"It's time for our CEOs and boards to exercise leadership by translating good intentions into concrete results. Addressing diversity and inclusion cannot wait until the economy fully recovers, until the budget is balanced, or until all of the other issues that are traditionally prioritized above an organization's "people focus" have been addressed."



found that in 10 sectors reviewed, women held only 18 percent of top leadership positions. And, across the nonprofit sector alone, women are poorly represented in relation to their percentage of the nonprofit workforce—45% vs. 75%.

For women of color, the same report indicated that race-based stereotypes limited progress in attaining leadership positions for African-American women, who endured “frequent questioning of credibility and authority, and a lack of institutional support.”

The White House Project Report: Benchmarking Women’s Leadership © 2009

<http://www.benchmarks.thewhitehouseproject.org>)

Changing the Status Quo

Moving mountains has never been easy, but if you have no plan to advance diversity goals things will not change for the better. Speaking of effecting change, countless studies show vast workplace improvements in production, collaboration, professional integrity, and successes increase exponentially when the workforce reflects a healthy diversity in backgrounds, ethnicity, gender, race, and other factors generally recognized as diversity related.

An authoritative diversity report Common Good published drew several strategies we recommend for spearheading change and fresher world views in workplace awareness. Some, such as creating open forums for clarity; sincere commitment and communicating effectively; and investing wholeheartedly in the development and advancement of your employees—should already be in your toolkit.

Don’t forget to seek out and work with organizations with expertise on recruiting with higher goals in mind, and examine hiring procedures you have to make sure they are fair and inclusive. (<http://commongoodcareers.org/diversityreport.pdf>)

Best Practices

The acronym, **SPLENDID**, represents a great approach from the **EEOC** to help leaders with diversity goals and challenges:

- **Study** the conditions and the laws to uncover problems which may already exist
- **Plan** strategies and develop a vision of what your company will look like when you have achieved full diversity at all levels of management.
- **Lead** senior, middle, and lower management to champion diversity and provide symbolic and actual leadership for its implementation.
- **Encourage** business practices and reward systems that promote diversity, and ensure that the appropriate accountability mechanisms are in place to assure progress and compliance. Reinforce

The acronym, **SPLENDID**, represents a great approach from the **EEOC** to help leaders with diversity goals and challenges.



communication of the message that diversity is a business asset and a key element of business success.

- **Notice** the impact of your practices—self-analysis is a key part of this process.
- **Discuss** and reinforce the message that diversity is a business asset and a key element of business success.
- **Include** everyone in this process, leave no one behind, and don't leave out white males; they should not be, nor do they want to be, "the problem."
- **Dedicate** time and expense for long term gains which may cost in the short term.

For promotion and advancement in hiring, we also suggest adhering to our favorite [Top 15 best practices](https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/task_reports/best_practices.cfm):

1. Eliminate practices which exclude or present barriers to minorities, women, persons with disabilities, older persons, or any individuals.
2. Establish a communication network notifying interested persons of opportunities, including advertising within the organization and, where applicable, not only with the general media, but with minority, persons with disabilities, older persons, and women-focused media.
3. Establish a policy for promotion and career advancement, including criteria, procedures, responsible individuals, and the applicability of diversity and affirmative action.
4. Ensure that you well train your staff in promotion and advancement to fully understand their equal employment opportunity responsibilities.
5. Include progress in equal employment opportunity in advancement and promotion as factors in management evaluation.
6. Define aims and identify applicable barriers to equal employment opportunity.
7. Develop methods to identify high-potential people.
8. Articulate the role's competencies, skills, and abilities.
9. Develop career plans and programs for high potential employees.
10. Provide sufficient training and opportunities for additional education.
11. Ensure that you make tools for continuous learning and optimum job performance available.
12. Provide tools to enable employees to self-manage careers.



13. Provide job transfer/rotation programs for career enhancing developmental experiences.
14. Provide employee resource centers, so individuals may have more opportunities to develop career plans.
15. Establish mentoring and networking programs and systems to help develop high potential individuals.

About the Author | Mikkell Roeland



Mikkell brings more than 10 years of experience as an executive recruiter and program manager to the Waldron team. As Search Director, she acts as a catalyst, pulling together the research, cultural insights, and networking necessary to find executive matches that help clients flourish. Prior to Waldron, Mikkell led recruitment programs for Adecco, sales initiatives for Abbott Laboratories, and partnership development for Verities Inc.

Mikkell Roeland
Search Director
mikkell@waldronhr.com

