Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Work

July 30, 2020

The Lepage Center's Strategic Advisers program connects Tulane students and recent graduates with New Orleans area entrepreneurs and small business owners who have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The advisers are working for the businesses full-time for 10 weeks during the summer of 2020, providing immediate services based on each business's specific needs.

The strategic advisers meet weekly via video conference to discuss what's going on at their companies and to learn from one another. **Last week we focused on diversity, equity and inclusion at work.** For this conversation, **advisers were asked how they would prioritize and communicate about diversity, equity and inclusion as leaders of a company.** Below are some of their thoughts:

"At larger companies, hiring is often directed towards target universities. Unsurprisingly, these universities typically have a large white majority, and therefore, the hiring process at these large companies is reflective of the white student populations. Thus, if a company is truly dedicated to promoting DEI in the workplace, they should shift their recruitment process to include a wider range of universities along with historically black colleges. Companies are often worried that by opening up the hiring process to a wider pool, they will be sacrificing quality of employees. However, this is an incorrect and racist narrative that is founded upon the same structural racism that keeps a strong white majority at the top universities in the United States. My company would continue a competitive hiring process but would open recruitment to a wider range of students."

"I would create a VERY flat organization where the CEO and the janitor are equally approachable. Even if a worker knows less than his/her boss, that individual may have a unique or useful take or perspective that creates value or leads to an innovation. I would hope that all my employees would feel respected and valued enough to consistently offer their perspectives."

"Diversity is one of the most important aspects on success in business today. Depending on what the target market of your company's products are, understanding the end user is crucial to the company."

"Affinity groups enable employees to come together to not only find solace but come together to cultivate meaningful, creative, and attainable strategies to combat racism, ableism, sexism, and a myriad of other issues that plague the workforce, all within the confines of their company culture. More often than not, individual concerns are silenced or not acted upon by those at the helm of larger institutions, organizations, and companies. Affinity groups are vital in this sense as it enables individuals to be empowered, supported, seen, and heard far more than when they stand alone."

"Looking at our current team, we are all white and come from different parts of the northeast. This was very challenging for me to see as I did not intentionally recruit a non-diverse team, but after looking at my recruiting tactics, I definitely put my job postings in non-diverse groups. This got me thinking of how I can change our practices and systems to ensure we apply inclusiveness into our business, instead of just talking about it. We are going to put more thought into where we put our job postings, instead of just putting thought into who we select. We have not done

everything we can to be inclusive, which will only hurt us in the long run as we are selecting from a smaller pool of talent."

"To continue to promote diversity, equality, and inclusion in a company I would run, I would implement a reverse mentor system in terms on the old vs new. In this system, the traditional mentor/mentee system would work the same when it came to do what the company does traditionally, but the opposite effect would be included as well. The mentee or newer employee would also try and teach the older or more experienced mentor what things are on the horizon in terms of change in the world they may not be aware of."

"Simply adding black and minority workers to your company will not change racist or oppressive systems. Change must come from the top, and to me that requires black and minority representation at the highest rung of the company, board of directors to executive team. No singular person will have the answer on how to solve these issues and create a 100% inclusive environment, so everyone must have a working understanding and ability to contribute to the conversation."