

Diversity in the Workplace

Diversity: The many ways we are all alike, and respect for the ways we are different.

How to Create a Practical Diversity Plan

by Wayne Boatwright

Since starting in the position of Chief Diversity Officer for Saint Mary's Health Care and Battle Creek Health System in 2002, and adding Mercy General Health Partners (Muskegon) in 2004, I have been flattered and surprised by the response of our communities and other health care organizations to our Diversity Action Plan. We have had over six hospital systems and seven private corporations request that we share our approach to the development of our Plan and how we have been able to create positive momentum and results.

It is important to note that we have not accomplished all the goals we have established; however, we are very encouraged with our progress.

My attempt through this writing is to outline our approach to formulating our Plan as well as select areas in our Plan that differentiate our Plan from others you may have reviewed.

1. I determined, first of all, that Diversity is part of the overall strategic plan for Trinity Health as well as the member organizations (Saint Mary's, Battle Creek and Mercy General). It is important that a diversity plan be a part of the overall strategic vision and not "something else".
2. For a plan to be successful, it must have two components; it must be measurable and there must be accountability. We have developed a score card that helps track our progress. I am also working with the HR department to create an area on management personnel's evaluations to reflect our Diversity goals.
3. I reviewed a lot of well written, professionally delivered plans prior to writing my own. In some cases these other plans were considered best practice. Unfortunately, in most cases the organizations did not show improvement in those areas that were identified on their report cards, (i.e. recruitment, retention, training and succession planning). It is important to determine the needs of your organization in the area of diversity. This can be done through facilitated discussions with your senior team and through Diversity assessments.
4. If you do not intend to make Diversity your issue alone, it is important that you put together a Diversity team or council. Some experts say that more than 10 or 15 members can be counter productive. It is important to remember that inclusion is better than exclusion. Find a way for willing individuals to participate. It is important to create a broad base of participation. This should include executives, physicians, nurses, hourly employees and community leaders. We also defined Diversity through the team. Diversity is: The many ways we are all alike, and respect for the ways we are different. Diversity is more than race and gender and we wanted to create a definition that all employees could remember and recite. This is also a good place to emphasize that Diversity is not just important as a Social Imperative. The Business imperative is also critical and soon there will be a strong emphasis on Compliance. It is important that your Council understand the importance of Diversity from a business and compliance perspective.
5. Support for the Diversity initiatives from all levels of the organization is important, but senior level support is critical. Both of our Diversity teams are co-chaired by the President and CEO's of each organization. The first Diversity conference that I attended in my new position was also attended by Phil McCorkle, President and CEO of Saint Mary's. One of our Diversity Champion's at Saint Mary's is David Baumgartner, MD, Vice President of Medical Affairs and Chief Technology Officer. Dr. Baumgartner facilitated my meeting with the Medical Executive Committee to discuss their role in the Diversity plan; he has also been a strong supporter with the senior leadership team.
6. The length of the plan is also critical and although it is important to develop a plan that will provide long term sustainable change, it is also important to have some short term wins to create momentum. Our plan is designed for 12 to 18 months. We have created checkpoints quarterly for consistent follow-up.
7. It is important to create plans for the overall organization; however, individuals need to understand their specific role in the success of the plan. I have started the Diversity objectives with the Board of Trustees and continued through the organization, indicating specific roles and tasks for each level of management. As an example, the Board had the specific responsibility of appointing an ethnic minority member to the board before January 2003, (which they accomplished). Another example is that the Board's pre-meeting luncheons will be catered twice a year by a diverse

restaurant. We started our Hispanic Month Celebration in October, by having the Board's luncheon catered by a local Mexican restaurant.

8. Setting appropriate goals for various managers should not be taken lightly. I have found that often individuals are not comfortable participating in or setting goals around diversity, because they have not had the experience. It was therefore important that in many instances I contacted diverse organizations, made introductions of our management and scheduled meetings for us to meet and share our diverse strategies with the community.

9. Diversity training and education is critical for the success of our initiatives. We are in the process of developing a diversity curriculum for all of our employees. We (Education Department and Diversity Department) have developed a relationship with a local college to deliver some training. Our strategy is that during General Orientation all employees would view a 15 minute video on Diversity called "Patient Diversity: Beyond the Vital Signs," with a 15 minute discussion afterwards. After employees complete their probation period, they would receive training called "Tolerating Intolerance", which focuses on institutional racism. Selected employees in the future will attend "The Institute of Healing Racism", and others will attend the Diversity Theatre. Management personnel may suggest other Diversity training, not included in the curriculum, for their employees. I suggest that you be very deliberate in the selection of training for your employees. All Diversity education will not meet your objectives and can often do more harm than good.

10. As I stated earlier, it is important to make the plan broad based. We wanted to ensure that the plan was not just experienced and discussed by the management team. We have created diversity topics to be discussed quarterly during our department meetings. This ensures that we continually keep the topic of Diversity in front of our employees until it becomes the natural part of our organization that it should be.

11. For any Diversity Plan to be successful, Diversity Champions must be recognized. One measure of success is the number of individuals who have seamlessly integrated the goals of the diversity plan into the work plan for their own departments/divisions. As these Champions emerge in greater numbers, the success of the diversity plan stabilizes and grows.

For additional information, please contact Cindy @ 616 752 6198 or myself @ 616 752 6181 in Grand Rapids, 269 966 8377 in Battle Creek, or 231 739 3961 in Muskegon. You may also contact me through E mail for any other area of discussion.

March 2005

©2006 Saint Mary's Health Care. All rights reserved.

See also <http://www.smmmc.org/career/diversity/>