

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin

Volume 158, No. 173

Emotional intelligence, diversity lead to success in business world

Today's global business environment drives the need for diversity and inclusion and they are essential ingredients in an organization's overall success. Now, more than ever, clients face issues that cross various geographies, age groups, backgrounds and ethnicities, and the legal workforce simply must reflect this reality.

Collaboration among diverse working groups leads to a broader framework within which problems are identified and examined and helps minimize the impact of people's weaknesses and blind spots by collectively leveraging on individual strengths. This, in turn, drives legal and business solutions that are both positive and powerful.

Businesses cannot create an environment that meaningfully respects and embraces people's differences without a healthy dose of emotional intelligence, or EI. Implementing a successful diversity and inclusion program, as well as ensuring the successful recruitment, development, retention and promotion of diverse talent, requires certain EI cornerstones such as effective relationship building as well as honesty, trust, empathy, caring and courage. The same is true of succession planning, which helps ensure that the organization evolves in alignment with its core values and business objectives.

What does diversity mean for an organization?

Creating a truly diverse work environment often requires fundamental, institutional social change. Raising the consciousness and awareness of diversity and inclusion is a continual process. It must be tailored specifically to the needs and desires of an individual organization. Employees at all levels must understand and prioritize these efforts so that diversity becomes ingrained in the culture.

Senior management must first carefully define the meaning of diversity within the context of their organization and must establish a mechanism by which to benchmark the business' diversity and inclusion performance against

both short- and long-term goals. Honesty, humility and integrity help ensure that diversity-related communications are sent, received and valued by employees. There needs to be open and frank discussions about successes and failures with respect to the organization's diversity and inclusion, or D&I, efforts and there must be mechanisms to help ensure that goals are achieved whenever possible.

Formal committees and other management frameworks often provide helpful ways to develop, implement and execute a strategic plan for diversity. Individuals who are charged with creating and preserving diversity within an organization must be held accountable for understanding all of the impacted employee groups and what motivates and inspires them and should be responsible for the ultimate success or failure of these efforts. For some, diversity is a moral discussion and is simply the right thing to do. Unfortunately, there are others for whom the economic business case must be established before they will offer their support.

"Walking the walk" is also a critical element in ensuring that D&I efforts are authentic and collaborative and not merely window dressing. There must be a direct link between an organization's proclaimed values and its actual deeds.

How to successfully create and maintain a diverse workforce

Businesses must first recruit diverse talent to create a diverse workplace. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways, particularly at the entry level, including through job fairs, networking events, summer internships and other activities focused on diversity awareness. Pipeline initiatives have recently become a popular recruiting tool both for law firms and corporations and are designed to help increase diverse law school enrollment. These programs are targeted to all academic levels, including high school and grammar school students. By de-



PARADIGM SHIFT

CHRISTINA L. MARTINI

Christina L. Martini is a practicing attorney, author and columnist. She is vice chair of the Chicago intellectual property practice group at DLA Piper and has been in private practice since 1994. She focuses her practice on domestic and international trademark, copyright, domain name, Internet, advertising and unfair competition law. She frequently speaks and writes regarding the legal and business landscapes and appears monthly in Chicago Lawyer magazine as a columnist of "Inside Out." You can reach her at christinamartini.paradigmshift@gmail.com.

veloping long-term relationships with these young adults and providing them with the support they need, there is a greater chance that they will attend law school, graduate and ultimately enter the workforce as a practicing lawyer.

Hiring talent is just the beginning of an effective D&I program. Consistent, meaningful mentoring and training is absolutely essential to ensure that both new recruits and longer term employees progress in their careers on the proper footing and that they effectively integrate into their de-

partment and organization. There must also be a recognition and understanding that the issues and challenges facing a diverse workforce are different and, in some ways, more complex and challenging than ever before. Everyone must try to understand, support and empathize with each other. "Diversity champions" are often critical in this regard and are typically powerful individuals within the senior ranks who are willing to provide meaningful, one-on-one support to more junior members of the organization.

The ultimate demonstration of faith and commitment in one's employees is through promotion and elevation. This goes hand in hand with retention and is often the most challenging part of the equation. Now, more than ever, successful advancement must be carefully evaluated and strategized well in advance of the promotion cycle, often by several years. There simply cannot be a successful long-term diversity effort without having a mechanism by which to ensure that there are senior role models for the next generation of lawyers.

Succession planning is yet another fundamental component in positioning the organization for the future. There should be recognition that everyone needs continued support, mentoring, guidance and leadership development training to ensure continued success, even those individuals at the senior levels of the organization.

The future of diversity and inclusion

These are just a few of the many tools with which organizations can maximize the effectiveness of their diversity and inclusion efforts. Ultimately, our individual and collective success hinges upon focusing on those qualities and circumstances which bring us together as professionals and as people, rather than on what divides us. This simple attitudinal and behavioral approach can make all the difference in causing the necessary paradigm shift to create more inclusive environments, both now and in the future.

“There needs to be open and frank discussions about successes and failures with respect to the organization's diversity and inclusion.”