

## **Kansas City Small Business Monthly**

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### **Leveraging a Culturally Diverse Staff**

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In case you haven't noticed, the makeup of the workforce is changing. Many industries are finding it harder to find the talent they need in many critical disciplines. The ability to recruit and retain outstanding employees is a competitive advantage that Companies must achieve.

The answer for many recruiters is to tap into the growing population of immigrants in this country. This segment of the population is growing year over year despite many of the legal and visa issues related to homeland security. In fact, many small businesses could not function without these workers that provide many essential functions and provide flexibility for employers that have seasonal demands.

While this strategy can be an excellent way to address the growing need for talent, it is not without challenge. Many employers are ill equipped to deal with many of the issues that can arise based on differing work styles, cultural values, customs and even different holidays. Trying to juggle the long list of demands for our businesses and building a high functioning workforce can be demanding, at best. So, what are businesses supposed to do to leverage a more diverse workforce and create more inclusion?  
(204)

### **Suggestions**

Here are some suggestions to help build on the differences of your workforce for the benefit of your Company:

- *Policies and procedures.* This is one of the most commonsense solutions and easiest to accomplish. This starts at the top with senior management setting the tone for the Company and a handbook that addresses your Equal Employment Opportunity and anti-harassment policies. Train your employees to make sure they understand how important a safe and inclusive work environment can be for your business.
- *Supervisory training.* Teach your managers and supervisors to value diversity and embrace differing points of view. Teach them some of the customs and cultural values of members of their staff. This will help them to understand how to better manage their teams and build more productive ones.
- *Translation services.* Identify a resource to help you for important Company announcements, newsletters and skill training. By communicating with your employees often and in a language they can better understand will insure all members of the workforce understand their role within the vision of the Company. To help defray the cost of these services, seek out a Not for Profit in your community. Many offer translation help as part of their community outreach initiatives.
- *Lunch and learns.* Sponsor theme days or weeks that help others in the Company learn about the different history and cultures represented in the Company. Employees can bring native cuisine or picture displays to share their heritage with others.
- *Floating Holidays.* To better accommodate the different holidays observed in multiple cultures, consider offering several floating holidays in addition to the statutory holidays on which you plan to close your business. You will build a more loyal employee base if they know that you truly value the things that are important to them.

## Benefits (506)

So, what are some of the rewards of leveraging a diverse workforce? How can this be an advantage for your business?

Here are some of the benefits:

- *Competitive Advantage.* When employees understand that their employer values things that are important to them, they are more loyal to the organization. Don't kid yourself and think that employees don't tell their friends about their work environment or that your reputation is not common knowledge of potential job candidates considering employment with your Company. This can be the difference between an employee choosing to work at your Company or another down the street. The cost of reducing turnover and retraining can be a real bottom line savings to your Company.
- *Increased creativity.* Valuing different and more diverse points of view equals more creativity. There is no question that teams made up of diverse points of view will come up with more unique solutions and product offerings. Harness that power and use it to your Company's advantage!
- *Highly functioning teams.* It is no secret that teams who trust each other and understand where team members are coming from are far more productive. This leads to better team work and leveraging the strengths of all on the team.
- *Customer value.* Customers have a keen sense for a Company that works well together. Customers can tell when an employee enjoys what they do and is proud of where they work. This can translate to better customer retention and higher sales for your Company.
- *Employee Relations.* By setting the tone at the top and creating a safe working environment for all employees, this will help avoid costly (both in time and money) employee relations issues. This type of environment leads to easier conflict resolution and better receptivity to change.

Employers that deal effectively with the many of the issues that can arise based on a workforce of differing work styles, cultural values, customs and even different holidays can position themselves with a competitive advantage in the race for superior talent. In the meantime, they may just end up with an extremely loyal workforce that enjoys where they work and outperforms the competition. That is a scenario that speaks positively to the bottom line of a Company.

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