



New Definition Of Diversity

Because of the legal attacks on race-based affirmative action programs, employers have had to rethink the strategies used to achieve their diversity goals. In response, a new definition of diversity has emerged -- one that includes race and other characteristics. In its broadest context, diversity candidates are being defined as "individuals who bring unique perspectives or outlooks to the organization."

The new definition of diversity includes the traditional categories of race and gender. In addition, it includes people with disabilities, gays and lesbians, and other non-traditional categories. One of the most interesting categories being used by some employers is "diversity of thought" – which they say can be obtained by hiring individuals with different degrees, college affiliations, education or social economic backgrounds from their current employees. What this means is that if you grew up in the inner city (or rural area, etc.) or attended a HBCU/HACU school, you may be able to bring diversity of thought to an organization that traditionally recruited from Ivy League schools.

Even though the definition of diversity has been expanded, racial minorities need not be concerned that they will lose opportunities. Employers clearly understand that they cannot relax their focus on racial diversity. In fact, by re-defining diversity they can dedicate more resources to diversity recruiting while avoiding concerns about reverse discrimination.

The new definition of diversity allows organizations to develop diversity recruiting strategies that are not race-based, (which is required in order to pass current legal tests) but still include seeking racial diversity. It is a sly and crafty way of getting around the law.

Who's Looking For Diversity?

Amidst the bad news about the slumping economy, major companies going bankrupt, downsizing and slow hiring, there is good news for diversity candidates. Public and private sector employers will both be looking for entry and management level diverse employees for the next several years.

Private sector employers realize that despite the slow growth scenario, they must continue their efforts to adjust to the changing demographics. Companies included in the list of "Top Diversity Employers" published in THE BLACK COLLEGIAN Magazine (October 2002) can be expected to continue or expand their efforts this year. In fact, many of those companies report that even if they hire fewer employees this year, diversity hires may not decline because they will comprise a larger percentage of the total.

The federal government will have tremendous staffing needs to fill over the next several years. In response to the events of September 11, 2001, the government has created new agencies (e.g., the Transportation Security Administration, or TSA, with more than 150,000 employees being hired) and expanded the hiring requirements of numerous other agencies. This is happening at a time when a significant percentage of their current employees are approaching retirement. The Office of Personnel Management reports that nearly a third of current federal employees will be eligible for retirement by 2005. With their outstanding record for diversity staffing, it can be expected that minority candidates will be tapped to fill many of these positions.

One other major workforce reality that is working in your favor is the retirement of the "Baby Boomers." The Baby Boomers entered the workforce in great numbers in the mid-seventies and early eighties, and hold an overwhelming share of management positions. Many public and private sector employers project that nearly half of their managers will be eligible for retirement in the next five years. As these managers are replaced, employers are keeping a more watchful eye on diversity. This will create significant mid- and senior-level opportunities for diverse candidates who are prepared for the challenge.

How To Identify Yourself As A Diverse Candidate

In the past, minority employment candidates may have been advised not to focus too much attention on their minority status for fear that it may be used against them. Today, the opposite may be true. Employers have moved diversity from a "nice thing to do" to a business necessity. What that means is that they are actively seeking diversity because failure to meet their diversity staffing goals may jeopardize the success of the organization.

I have clients who tell me they are looking for diverse candidates but have a hard time identifying them in the resumes being screened. You can help by making it

easy for them to identify you as a diverse candidate. The following strategies are offered for diverse applicants.

1. When submitting a resume to an employer, use your cover letter or e-mail memo to highlight your diversity status. Remember that the new definition of diversity includes more than race and gender. Provide the employer a "road map" to all the ways in which you can bring "diversity of thought" to the organization. This information should be presented in a creative way that reflects your personality and style. It may include a little background on where you were raised, life experiences that provided you with a unique cultural view (e.g., lived overseas, bi-cultural, bi-lingual) or even information about how your HBCU, HACU or mainstream college experience uniquely prepared you for the workplace.

2. Include on your resume your fraternity or sorority membership. Consider adding a brief description of the organization to ensure its diversity affiliation is clear (e.g., "I am a member of XYZ Sorority ... a one hundred year-old, predominately African-American service organization").

3. Mention any affiliation with prominent minority or diversity organizations. If you are more than just a dues paying member, state how you have supported the organization (attended conferences, presented at conferences, appointed/elected to serve on committees, etc.).

4. Describe any community service or other volunteer work. The willingness to give of your time to help others speaks to your character – an increasingly sought after commodity. In addition, it provides employers with an indication that career opportunity, not dollars, may be your highest priority in your job search. This is especially important for some of the federal jobs where salaries may lag behind that of corporate employers.

5. Include military service on your resume. Many federal agencies are able to provide preferential hiring status to ex-military applicants.

6. State on your resume any security clearance held. Indicate what organization the clearance is or was with, effective dates and the level of clearance. This is extremely important in today's environment. Many of the new jobs (especially those related to Homeland Security) require background checks and/or security clearances. The fact that you have clearances (or have had them in the past) can

save an employer tens of thousands of dollars and months of time in processing you for employment.

7. Stress your willingness to apply your degree in non-traditional ways. Many employers have shifted their hiring focus to identifying talented applicants (regardless of their majors) who are willing to be trained for the available jobs. They are looking for applicants who share this interest. For example, the 150,000 jobs with TSA are being filled with individuals with all types of educational backgrounds. What the employer is focusing on are applicants who have demonstrated honesty, integrity, and loyalty.