BPI group

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Developing A Diverse Leadership Pipeline

With Diana Faison, Managing Director, Leadership Acceleration, BPI group

Research shows that diverse and inclusive cultures are more successful than others. Bringing varied backgrounds and viewpoints to the table results in better decision-making and higher business impact. Yet organizations continue to struggle to create more diverse, equitable and inclusive cultures–and it starts with the leadership pipeline. Here Diana Faison, Managing Director, Leadership Acceleration, BPI group, shares some best practices for investing in diverse leaders and creating a plan for a more diverse pipeline.

Q Where should organizations begin when building better development practices?

A Organizations need to understand why investing in diverse talent is important to their success. The business case is often built around one of two issues that need improvement: promotion rates and retention rates. HR leaders need to analyze promotion rates to see if they are leveraging diverse internal candidates for management and leadership positions or if they are hiring externally. If they aren't developing their women and people of color, they are likely not promoting or retaining them. Both factors are costly since they require recruiting and onboarding new talent. Once leaders understand the business problem, they can solve it through leadership development and other retention strategies, and ultimately earn C-suite buy-in for a more diverse pipeline.

Q What strategies can be used to help identify potential leaders from a diverse pool?

A Once organizations decide to invest in building diverse leaders, HR needs strategies for identifying top talent. One strategy is "the influence effect" – helping diverse high-potential leaders who might be stuck in the pipeline push past the barriers of office politics and learn how to exert influence in significant ways. For example, the "power of the informal" helps potential leaders use informal networking techniques, such as grabbing coffee or lunch in a relaxed setting, to build key relationships. These occasions provide an opportunity to test perspectives with colleagues and build consensus for ideas. Mentorships and peer support are important here as well.

Q How can organizations understand the skills they need?

A Skills gaps are among the biggest obstacles to advancing your high-potential talent. All organizations suffer from this phenomenon, in which even the most promising talent doesn't have the skills required to advance to the next level.

One effective tool for individuals to identify and address these gaps is an exercise called a "personal board of directors." Visualize a boardroom with a large table and plenty of chairs. In the center of the table is the individual's development goal. Label the chairs around the table with the skills, knowledge, and information the individual lacks to achieve this goal. Then think about colleagues in the organization who can help close the gaps. Be sure to sponsor a diverse group of high potentials for this exercise. Research shows that 38% of senior-level women will sponsor a WOC and only 23% of men do.

Q What impact does culture have?

A A culture audit/assessment is a good place to start if trying to improve DE&I efforts. Be sure to consider what would be improved through DEI&--the customer experience would be better, employees would have more engagement--and build ROI around that.

Organizations need sponsorship at the top for real culture change. DE&I can impact employee engagement, profitability, creative solutions, and customer experience. Everything cascades from true ownership: If organizations do the hard work of culture change, it's going to make them a better business.

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