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Dallas HR Conference Explores Diversity, Bottom Line

By Heidi Basantes Shipp

More than 160 human resource professionals attended the Dallas Human Resource Management Association's Diversity Conference held Nov. 11 at the Dallas Infomart.

The DHRMA diversity mission is to develop diversity initiatives that foster an environment of inclusion where diversity is integrated and celebrated in every aspect of the organization. The conference's theme of "The Dollars and Sense of Diversity" explored the relationship between diversity and the bottom line, providing business cases and real-life applications. "As we explored a theme for this year's conference, there was much discussion around diversity and how it adds to the bottom line," said Cassandra Brown-English, PHR, DHRMA Inc. vice president of diversity and conference chair. "We realized that many companies have a lot of diversity within their current employee base (but) they're just not tapping into that resource. We came upon the title, 'The Dollars and Sense of Diversity,' in hopes of getting companies to realize that diversity does make sense, and above all it can also add dollars to the bottom line, providing companies with a strategic edge."

Getting to the bottom line

The conference featured an opening learning session, eight different breakout sessions, a keynote presentation, and a mega session in the afternoon. Jarrell Gibbs, retired president of TXU Corp., provided the keynote presentation.

Beth Monson, PHR, CPC, CTS, staffing manager for High Profile Staffing Services and president of DHRMA, described Gibbs as a champion for diversity.

Gibbs, who served as vice chairman and president of TXU for a combined five years, spoke about the history of diversity in the United States. In his speech, aptly titled "The Dollars and Sense of Diversity," Gibbs said the principles behind the founding of the nation encourages diversity. "I happen to believe the more diverse any organization is, the better equipped that they are to handle different situations and find the optimum solution in any business decision," Gibbs told Minority Business News. "The diversity of thought, of background, (and) of the way you process things will ultimately create the best solution."

Diane McClendon, executive director of DHRMA, said audience turnout was on par with last year's

conference. Conference participants were able to attend sessions such as "Diversity and the Bottom Line," "The Color of Money: Supplier Diversity Programs Adding Value," and "Diversity: Can We

Afford Not to Consider It?," among others.

Albert Titus Jr., an independent human resources diversity consultant, presented the "Diversity: Can We Afford Not to Consider It?" session. He cited real-life examples of how diversity affects the bottom line. "When you don't value differences (and) when you don't practice what you preach, as far as your behavior is concerned, in the workplace, it impacts the bottom line," he said. "There's a lot that can happen if you don't respect differences in the workplace < there's a cost related to it." Titus said that in certain situations new employees are hired or not hired based on stereotypes. During his session the stereotype of the "dumb blond" was brought up. A blond woman may have greater skills than a man going after the same job, but get brushed aside because of stereotypes against blond females, he said. These kinds of decisions impact the bottom line, he explained, because a company's most valuable asset is full utilization of the workforce.

Response to sessions, like that of Titus¹, was positive Brown-English said, because there is not a direct blueprint for making diversity work. "The conference provided an opportunity for conference attendees to see what was working for some and hopefully take away ideas for leveraging diversity that might work for them and their companies," said Brown-English, who is also the human resources manager for Pro-Line International Inc.

How white men fit into the diversity puzzle and the bottom line

Besides focusing on diversity and the bottom line, a session was also held regarding where and how white men fit into diversity. Karen Stinson, CEO and founder of ProGroup Inc., C. Philip Bamberger, executive consultant of ProGroup Inc., and Richard Grote, president of Hypersites, conducted the session titled "White Men and the Diversity Puzzle: Where do they fit?"

"The reality is they fit in everywhere," Bamberger later told Minority Business News. "There isn't a place where they don't fit in. How they fit in is being willing to be engaged and understand the topic is bigger than just race and gender. Because of the influence that some white men have in an organization, when they're a positive influence and factor in the diversity initiative they add a tremendous amount of value to not only themselves, but to the initiative itself and to everyone."

Stinson, who established the Minneapolis based ProGroup Inc. in 1986, said white men should approach building relationships with women and people of color with the mindset of being open to learning different perspectives because of the value they bring.

"It takes time, patience and it takes an ongoing commitment," Stinson said. "Sometimes it takes courage because the more different two people are, the longer it will take to build that trust and build that relationship." ProGroup Inc. is a consulting and training firm specializing in workplace and marketplace diversity. Both Bamberger and Stinson have been involved with diversity initiatives for many years.

"There's got to be a willingness for people to walk in and say, 'I realize my perspective is not the

only one that's valuable, even if I've been successful with it," Bamberger said. Stinson agreed. "Unless you help the white male see their role in it," Stinson said, "and make them feel they're part of it and there's a benefit to them to doing a diversity initiative, it's going to fail."

During the diversity session, Stinson gave these tips to the audience:

1. Model the behavior of appreciation and acceptance of everyone.
2. Make the rounds and seek diverse perspectives before you act.
3. Create a multicultural network of advisors and use them.
4. Volunteer to mentor people different from you.
5. Walk the talk of inclusion when you hire, promote, assign and reward.
6. Call others on their disrespectful behavior because it reflects on you.

Future Dallas HR initiatives

Next year's diversity initiative is already underway. "There are issues that are very specific to human resources that regard diversity," Monson said. "We have a person who is working on those particular issues so that we can be the recognized voice in human resources and diversity for the Dallas area. We wanted to prove how diversity does impact the bottom line. It makes a lot of sense for companies to have diversity programs."

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