



HR TOPICS

# 12 Truths About Spearheading Diversity and Inclusion

By Kathy Gurchiek

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**A**USTIN—Do you ever wish, as a diversity and inclusion (D&I) practitioner, that someone had sat you down and told you what it takes to lead D&I efforts at an organization?

Leadership and strategy consultant Grace A. Odums of Philadelphia gave attendees at the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Diversity & Inclusion Conference & Exposition tried-and-true tips about being a D&I leader when the conference opened Oct. 25.

First, the D&I leader must assess the organization to know what it needs, Odums said. What are the organization's strategic themes? What is the organization doing that it wishes to stop or wishes to continue? What initiative does it want to start?

Using humor and practical tips, Odums' David Letterman, "Late Show"-style list counted down the following "12 Truths You Wish Someone Told You About Spearheading D&I":

## **12. Define and describe what D&I means in your organization; it should be about more than race and gender.**

Outline the change the organization is looking to make; it may be to broaden its thought leadership or to diversify the top levels of management that have been homogenous for too long.

## **11. Consider how employee resource groups (ERGs) add value, and move the organization closer to executing its strategic objectives.**

ERGs have to be aligned with the organization's strategic objectives, Odums said. It's important that each ERG has a charter so a meeting of the group doesn't turn into "a kvetch session" where nothing is accomplished. The charter should spell out the council's responsibilities and how it will work within the organization.

She has found that 13 members is the optimum size for an effective council, with three to five members making up the council's core. The other members, such as D&I champions, subject matter experts and "legends"—longtime, respected company employees—serve as the council's support.

## **10. External sources, such as colleges and universities, volunteers and interns, can provide support.**

Educational institutions are available to come into an organization to collect D&I data and present a summation of their

findings, according to Odums.

**9. External stakeholders such as industry insiders, board members and subject matter experts are valuable resources who can "help take up the cause for you."**

**8. Overcome any resistance to D&I efforts by overcommunicating, relying on change agents, linking D&I to compensation and identifying data "that supports your next move."**

Odums advised recruiting a sponsor from the executive team. It is best if that sponsor is not the chief human resources officer so that D&I does not become siloed into HR, she said.

When faced with resistance to D&I efforts, Odums advised practitioners not to take the rejection personally. In fact, she has found that "no" is not always a permanent answer.

"Tell them where you're headed [with D&I] and why."

Leaders will want to know, she said, how a diverse and inclusive workforce will increase the organization's market share, raise productivity and effectiveness, and make and save the organization money.

"People don't change their behavior unless it's tied to something" such as financial gain, she said.

**7. The diversity council should be made up of people of character.**

"As members of the council go, so does D&I in your organization," Odums said. Make sure that council members are people of vision and integrity who are able to communicate with individuals at all levels of the organization.

**6. Build a network.**

"These are people [I] can call and say to them, 'You won't believe what just happened,' and no one will judge me. ... And then they ask you, respectfully, 'So what are you going to do about it?'"

Create opportunities for teamwork by reaching across departments to work on projects identified with D&I.

"You need to be seen as the connector," Odums said.

**5. You may be working with no budget.**

She encouraged HR professionals to identify two or three easy D&I "wins" that can help establish their credibility as people who can be trusted with the time and money needed to accomplish larger D&I efforts.

**4. Use meaningful organizational measures for D&I initiatives.**

Link recruitment, retention, engagement and other organizational concerns to the employer's dashboard and balanced scorecard.

**3. Prepare the organization for D&I.**

Create plans for education, marketing and communications.

"Have a playbook for the organization and your personal playbook on how you're going to execute" D&I efforts, Odums said.

**2. Have a strategy.**

Have three top strategic objectives, create a D&I strategic plan and know how you aim to execute it. "You must understand strategy, how to execute strategy," Odums said and recommended *The Strategy-Focused Organization* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2000) as a resource.

#### **1. Develop leadership acumen.**

"Sharpen your leadership sword at every turn. You must!" she said.

Passion is required to drive D&I efforts, Odums emphasized.

"If you are not passionate about this work ... get out."

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