



Diversity challenge...three perspectives

BY MAUREEN BROWN

In your organization concerns have arisen about the clear absence of women in several key areas. The leadership has announced a diversity initiative geared to addressing this situation. As a change agent, however, you know that the absence of women in key areas is symptomatic of a deeper systemic problem of exclusion. The organization has three choices:

1. Leave the gender-based initiative in place: this is where the need has been identified
2. Make a pitch to include other dimensions of diversity simultaneously
3. Use the gender-based initiative as a lead-in for others, once the original problem has been cleared.

What would you recommend?

Option 1: While a single-dimension inclusion initiative might achieve its numerical goal, it can become a one-off that

- a) benefits only one group in the organization
- b) triggers favoritism, and
- c) focuses on manifestations of exclusion rather than the root—the same root responsible for other forms of inequities.

Option 3: The idea of other dimensions of diversity having to 'wait their turn' is archaic and impractical. How long will persons with disabilities have to wait until every woman is positioned where she needs to be? What about women diverse in other ways such as being racialized or having disabilities? It would be impossible to isolate gender from other dimensions of diversity.

Option 2: This option encourages the organization to examine the roots of exclusion in its systems (including its culture) and in its operations. In this scenario to be inclusive means using a holistic approach that addresses both the overall environment and individual aspects of exclusion. In the long run this is best for the organization.

Maureen Brown is the founder and lead consultant of DiversityTrainersPlus. DiversityTrainersPlus specializes in assessment, training and strategic planning to equip organizations in maximizing the benefits of diversity. For more information visit www.diversitytrainersplus.com or phone 905.338.7515.