



VIP: Pitney Bowes

For more than 85 years Pitney Bowes has been synonymous with postage meters. Today, the company is more than just mailing solutions. It's the force behind of location intelligence such as GPS, and the software technology that enables e-Bay to calculate its shipping services and Mapquest to provide directions. And now through its Employee Value Proposition, it's ready to promote and market itself as a diversity employer.

Karen Bell is Pitney Bowes' vice president of human resources and an American. When she appeared on the Canadian scene just three years ago, one of her mandates was to implement some of the key elements from the company's global diversity program. Which was a lot easier said than done.

"It was initially thought to be a uniquely US concept, if you would," says Bell. "There was a school of thought that said, 'We understand diversity intellectually, but it's not a really big issue for us because of the multicultural aspect of living in and around the greater Toronto area'."

Bell admits she was stopped in her tracks, that whenever she mentioned the word, "the hairs on the backs of people's necks would sort of prickle." So she decided to come at diversity in a different way, and rather than calling it what it was, in terms of an initiative or even a program, she referred to it as "a barrier-free work environment."

"And that seemed to resonate with our executives and our senior executive team much more than saying 'diversity,'" she says. "Then it began to take a different tone, and it began to take an integrated, 'into the fabric' of PB Canada's approach."

Now Bell could get to work, introducing those key elements of the global strategy, having her HR generalists across the country implement it, getting buy-in, and most importantly recognizing that PB Canada "can be leaders in those areas (of diversity and inclusion) in terms of how we push those boundaries."

Enter the Employee Value Proposition, which is inextricably linked to how Pitney Bowes markets itself as a diversity employer to attract, retain and engage that pool of dedicated employees.

"What is an employee going to value from us as they go through their employee life cycle?" Bell asks. "And then what do we need to supply as an employer to keep that person engaged, and to keep that person productive, and to keep that person having a level of commitment to Pitney Bowes?"

The attraction piece was relatively easy. Connect with community outreach organizations, show up at career fairs, talk to community college and university graduates. The retention piece proved a little more difficult because of one inherent obstacle: hiring manager bias. To overcome that last year Bell held a mandatory half-day Bias Awareness Workshop. The feedback she got was "an eye-opener" for her.

"People didn't realize that the things that they had as filters weren't necessarily coming through in the interview process," she says.

And the results of the workshop have been gratifying in terms of those same hiring managers looking past names, for instance, on applications and making built-in assumptions. Something that will change the landscape at Pitney Bowes as it begins taking advantage of the resources available with new Canadians.

"It's a huge population; it's a huge talent pool that people have just not tapped into with any great level of success," says Bell. "And I think partially because of the barriers we put up and the hurdles we ask people to jump through in order to be able fit. And that's going to be an issue for us going forward."

But less of an issue now than it was three years ago, before Bell appeared on the scene and created the "barrier-free working environment" at Pitney Bowes. How's it working so far? One only has to take a look at the company's annual employee engagement survey. An 85% participation rate says it all. **DI**