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BEST PRACTICES

Hiring inclusively makes business sense

BY MARTIN DAKS

When Atlantic Health System recruits potential employees, the health care provider tries to connect with a diverse audience.

"When we refer to 'diverse' candidates, we're not limited to certain categories, like sexual orientation, or religion," said Nikki Sumpter, senior vice president and chief human resources officer. "We work with Hispanic, veterans, religious and other organizations to identify candidates and shape our policies, because diversity isn't just about attributes that you can see."

To recruit candidates, Atlantic Health System uses advertising and other imagery "that shows our team members in their environment," Sumpter said. "We show team members in a wheelchair for example, so that people can see that we're open and inclusive. We provide services for a diverse population, so having an inclusive workforce helps us to do a better job of connecting with them; and internally, it makes our organization even better at creating solutions, because we can deploy different mindsets."

The approach of Atlantic Health System, which was named as one of the Best Workplaces for Diversity by Fortune magazine, illustrates some of the complexities that companies face when they try to do the right thing by embracing an inclusive policy. Should they focus on race, religion, gender, or other attributes? Will their efforts be seen as genuine or merely a token effort, in which some highly visible positions are staffed with minorities, while key decision-making spots are filled through the usual old-boy's network?

When it comes to "best practices," New Jersey-based and other companies are increasingly flexing their intellectual resources and discovering a variety of ways to reach out and tap the talents of underrepresented or ignored population segments.

"We are using technology with artificial intelligence to eliminate gender bias in job descriptions so more people with the needed skills will apply for positions," Johnson & Johnson Chief Diversity Officer Wanda Hope said. "We're also embedding diversity and inclusion into recruiting by ensuring diverse slates for open positions, deepening relationships with target universities and MBA programs and embedding unconscious bias training as a key capability for managers who interview candidates."

New Brunswick-based J&J, which recently topped DiversityInc's list of Top 50 Companies for Diversity, is integrating diversity and inclusion concepts company-wide, she added.

"We're embedding unconscious bias training and D&I within our standard management training courses – not as a D&I silo but integrated within all the management training content [and] we have mentoring and sponsorship programs aimed at diverse talent."

At human resources and payroll company ADP, "We incorporate diversity in our hiring and our succession leadership processes," said Rita Mitjans, chief diversity and corporate social responsibility officer.

"When we have leadership and other openings, we not only look at a diverse slate of candidates, we also utilize interviewers who come from

"We're ... embedding diversity and inclusion into recruiting." — Johnson & Johnson's Wanda Bryant Hope



Wanda Bryant Hope, chief diversity and inclusion officer, Johnson & Johnson. - AARON HOUSTON

diverse backgrounds," Mitjans said. "At ADP, we're also expanding our training to address unconscious biases that may affect an individual's hiring and promotion decisions without even realizing it."

ADP — which made the DiversityInc list and a similar one from Black Enterprise magazine — has strategic partnerships with organizations including Professional Diversity Network, National Sales Network and others to promote inclusiveness. "We also recruit at schools with diverse talent," Mitjans added.

"We're in a highly competitive environment," she said. "If we discount anyone, we're shortchanging ourselves from attracting top talent. Additionally, millennials make up more than 50 percent of our workforce, and millennials value diversity."

Some people still believe "if you are seeking diverse candidates, you are lowering your qualification standards for the position," said Celeste Warren, vice president of human resources and chief diversity officer at Merck, which made the Black Enterprise list.

"But the labor market is such that we should be able to source qualified candidates of all aspects of diversity," Warren said. "Excellence and diversity are not mutually exclusive concepts, they are one and the same."

Diversity goes past "visual" attributes like race, ethnicity and gender, she added.

"It is even more important that we acknowledge and respect every aspect of diversity by creating a culture of inclusion where everyone can thrive and be productive in the workplace," Warren said.

"A company simply cannot claim to have the best and brightest employees if it does not have a diverse employee base," said Patrick Dunican Jr., chairman and managing director of Newark-based law firm Gibbons P.C. "Diversity of perspective results in diversity of solutions, and we are in the solution-delivery business."

Gibbons, which made Fortune's diversity list, recruits and retains a diverse workforce in a variety of ways.

"Our attorneys are active in minority bar associations and similar organizations, while the Gibbons Women's Initiative has forged close working ties with several other women's organizations that share a similar mission to advance women in the workplace," Dunican said. "So we are always meeting and engaging with a wide range of diverse job candidates."

Said Rowan University President Dr. Ali Houshmand: "If your leadership and workforce are not representative of the society, then your message is not reaching your entire audience. It's important to let individuals know that they're unique and valued, but you also have to supply role models."



Sumpter



Dunican Jr.



Houshmand