



Diversity is About Business Sustainability

Business leaders recognize that no organization is an island unto itself. So everything happening in the changing face of America will eventually impact our organizations. Today, one of the gale force winds hitting our business landscape is the impact of diversity trends.

In my earlier days as a business consultant, companies hired my firm to come in and consult with them on issues they were having around “diversity.” In those days, almost two decades ago, managers were really telling me they were having race and gender issues; and they wanted me to come in and “fix the problem.”

Even today as a business owner, diversity as a personnel or business issue is much talked about but very much misunderstood. I’m on the board of our industry association and co-chair their diversity council and I recently asked several business leaders about their definition of diversity and their thoughts on diversity trends in America. Unfortunately, many of those asked still associate diversity and diversity trends in the business environment as a race and gender issue!

It is true that business leaders and managers are facing the most diverse workforce ever. The evidence of this is seen in the number of women, minorities, immigrants and the increasing age, gender, ethnicity and lifestyle issues. While business leaders are managing the internal workforce issues they sometimes miss the external changes on their business environment.

As Leaders, we need to prepare ourselves and our organizations by identifying where and how diversity trends could impact our organization. In this article I would like to focus on the business issues we must consider. Not if but where and how diversity trends will affect our business profitability, performance and sustainability.

Where will it affect you and your organization?

1. **IDENTIFYING** THE REALITIES AND FORCES FOR CHANGE THAT WILL APPEAR IN YOUR WORLD.

- Interdependencies with your
 - Suppliers
 - Customers
 - Community
 - Workforce
- Changes or demands in your
 - Industry
 - Trade and Chamber/Business Associations
 - Government contracts
 - Regional economies
- Facing the reality of change
 - Your school system draws from the socio-economic residents attracted to your region = workforce
 - Your suppliers are facing increased competition and same workforce change themselves
 - Your customers have any or all of these
 - Expectation of diversity clearly articulated
 - Changing management with different styles/cultures
 - Increased choices in supplier relationships
 - Changing workforce issues
 - Companies competing for the best workers

Business leaders must be the catalyst for their organizations to create an environment that fosters:

- Personal growth and opportunities for all our employees.
- Business sustainability built on profitability and performance of all our employees.
- Customer retention and satisfaction
- Policies and products that move the entire organization closer to fulfilling its Mission and Vision to all the clients we serve.

I'm rooting for your success!

-André Thornton, Chairman & CEO, ASW Global