

# Diversity Best Practices

by Cris Wildermuth

You're in a meeting with the Human Resources team. The issue at hand: Mary, one of the plant operators, is accusing Joe, a line leader, of discrimination.

"Call our lawyer," someone says. Another person suggests diversity training and recommends a "great consultant from New York." The VP makes a decision: "Let's put together a diversity task force," she says. In a helpful mood, your colleagues give you the names of managers and supervisors who are either women, minorities or a Godsend ... both! You get back to your office and invite all names in the list for a preliminary meeting.

What's wrong with this picture?

Calling a lawyer is fine. You should indeed have legal counsel when facing discrimination complaints. It's not your lawyer's job, however, to change the organization's culture or make sure that it is attractive to *all* talented people – not just the ones who look like the CEO.

Here are three tips on how to start addressing dilemmas like the one described.

## 1. Involve Everyone

Diversity is not only about race and gender – it's about the many traits that make us unique and able to contribute to society in different ways. A task force is a good idea ... *if* your task force truly reflects the diversity of your organization. That means not only managers, not only women, not only minorities, and not only people who love diversity.

## 2. Have a Roadmap

Without a thorough needs analysis it's impossible to know which diversity area needs to be prioritized. I have trained at organizations in which the biggest problem was combining the cultures of two different plants. Another client faced a huge division between management and the unionized labor. Which is the biggest problem area at *your* organization?

## 3. Think Big

Make sure training is part of a larger initiative. The level of diversity friendliness of your organization depends more on its recruitment, promotion, reward and compensation practices than on diversity training programs. Am I saying that diversity training has no place? Of course not. Good quality training is an important part of the picture, but not the *only* part. Training will do no good if your employees perceive it to be a "checkmark" in your HR policy book rather than a real improvement effort.

Diversity development is a long, exciting road. Quick fixes won't work, but a true commitment to the road itself will. Enjoy the ride!