

Bulletin Board: Diversity plays a role in surviving the economic downturn

by Amy_Winter

Diversity in the workplace may give companies an extra edge when competing in the economic downturn. Businesses need diversity in order to connect with clients, according to Martha Fields, CEO and founder of Fields Associates Inc., an international management consulting firm. A range of ages, races and cultures gives a company a better ability to serve customers from different nations.

Businesses require a workplace and product that appeals to both a national and worldwide market; customers are needed from the U.S. and around the world to stay alive. This becomes even more essential during these hard economic times.

Diversity can aid a company in gaining a more global outlook, but a multicultural workplace may also mean more tension with different opinions and backgrounds coming together.

"With diversity comes opportunity," says Fields, "however with diversity comes conflict. The question our businesses face right now is how to integrate our multicultural nation in a way that empowers our economy and strengthens our global positioning."

A major clash in the workplace revolves around age. Fields refers to the age range as the "AARP to MTV watchers," especially with a greater number of older workers staying in the work force. Although younger workers have less experience, they tend to be chosen over older workers due to their lower salaries. Plus, younger employees are more inclined to be open to diversity; they grew up in a more multicultural time. Fields recommends that organizations make an effort to deal with conflicts between age groups.

Developing diversity takes time, although it is moving at a faster pace. Companies that don't embrace it will be left behind. Leaders should be trained in how to use diversity to gain a competitive advantage, according to Fields. Make sure managers understand how to control issues that develop from various cultures and opinions.

"A business with diverse customers and a diverse workplace can outperform other companies," says Fields. "If you and your employees can't handle customers, you are going to lose them to someone else."

For more information on Fields and her company, visit www.marthafields.com.

OFFICE BETS

Workers may have been a little distracted the last few weeks at the office. The March Madness basketball tournament brings an increase in office pools. Eighteen percent of employees, according to a CareerBuilder.com survey, say they have joined March Madness pools in the workplace.

Male workers tend to be more involved in the basketball tournament. Twenty-four percent of male respondents admitted to participating in pools, compared to 11 percent of female employees.

And it seems the Midwest can't keep away from all the basketball action. Twenty-three percent of Midwest employees have taken part in office pools. This is compared to 18 percent of workers in the Northeast, 16 percent in the South and 15 percent in the West.

Although March Madness is a common reason to start an office pool, workers have also made bets on:

• How far the Dow Jones would drop that week.

• How many e-mails the new manager would send in a day.

• What employee would win a burrito-eating contest.

• Co-workers' cholesterol numbers.

• When the building would be condemned.

• The amount of time it would take for a couple to break up.

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