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## Are Diversity and Inclusiveness Really Possible?

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## Are Diversity and Inclusiveness Really Possible?

**By Vanerssa Lopez-Littleton**  
UCF Forum columnist  
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I recently overheard one manager ask another if he knew a nurse who was looking for a job. After a moment of thinking, he remembered someone. Within a week, an offer of employment was made for a great-paying job with a wonderful schedule. It is a position that will open doors and create opportunities as well as move this individual into circles he may not have been privy to otherwise.

I'm not saying this person wasn't qualified, the most qualified or didn't deserve the position. My concern is for the missed opportunity to demonstrate a commitment to the diversity and inclusiveness heralded from the highest peaks of their organization as well as serving as a core value and guiding principle in their mission statement. Thus, the situation raised my curiosity.

After thinking about it for quite some time, I decided to say something. When I mentioned the situation to the manager, he said the position needed to be filled as quickly as possible. He went even further to justify his actions by noting the individual he had asked for assistance was very well connected to the community and knew almost everyone in town. Granted, we live in Orlando, a city with a metropolitan area that exceeds 2 million people, so, I have my doubts about that.

Standing there with my eyebrow raised, I asked if by chance the new hire is a minority. He smirked and said, "No, not this time." Surprisingly, he winked and said the next time he needs to hire someone posthaste he would be sure to ask me for a few names.

As I was shaking my head as I walked away, he just didn't get it. I was not asking to be involved in the hiring process nor do I feel as if I am Johnny-on-the-spot with binders full of minorities.

I understand there are times when employers need to fill positions quickly, even though they have established hiring policies. However, I also recognize the hallmark of a good manager. A good manager would have access to a myriad of networks to support hiring needs from a diverse pool of candidates.

This reminds me of a time when a former supervisor asked me if I would sit in on meetings with potential financial donors who were black. I was perplexed by his question because my position was clinical and not directly linked to development. The challenge here was either his feelings of inadequacy in working with blacks or his failure to invite me to participate on the development team, if that is what was needed.

Although these incidents occurred more than a decade apart, they represent failures on the part of these managers to adequately administer diversity and inclusiveness practices. These are examples of the disconnect between an organization aiming for diversity and inclusiveness, and the actual implementation of policies to demonstrate that commitment.

In order for an organization to be successful in creating a diverse and inclusive environment, some of the onus is on the managers to understand what diversity is and is not. Even further, organizations must ensure managers understand their roles in serving as gatekeepers of the process. A critical part of diversity is creating access and opportunities for minorities to compete on a level playing field. But they have to be given the chance. The push is not toward hiring droves of minorities, establishing quotas, or inviting minorities to participate simply because of their minority status.

If we don't raise the level of consciousness of those in positions to directly shape lives and change communities, we don't generate the impact we are seeking. Resultantly, diversity and inclusiveness become nothing more than a slogan, and minorities are once again denied equality of opportunity.

We used to call it the good ol' boys club. We knew who was invited and who was not. It was just the way things were done.

The challenge today is that the same practices that excluded minorities are still prevalent, but we don't have a name for it. As diversity and inclusiveness have become ubiquitous buzzwords, I wonder: Is it really possible to create a playing field that gives everyone a fair chance?

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