Chapter 41
Sustaining and Retaining the Diversity Practitioner

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the ways in which an organization or an institution can utilize a diversity practitioner for success. This chapter explores the culture of the organization and what the senior management needs to be mindful of in the hiring process and beyond. The chapter then investigates the practices that should be carried out by the organization that will prompt a practitioner for success. It explores the considerations as the practitioner works in the organization on establishing a quality work environment. With a visible commitment and support of the individual and the expected outcomes, the practitioner will be a critical part of the organization's success. Organizations have to be strategic and intentional about implementing measures to assure the diversity practitioner has the tools they need. The organization has a responsibility to recognize the emotional toll and additional stress of being in the diversity practitioner role. Clear expectations and strategies are offered.

INTRODUCTION

Many establishments, institutions, and organizations have thought deeply and strategically about the hiring process in search of someone to champion areas of DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion). A job description has usually been thoroughly crafted to recruit a knowledgeable individual with the education, training, and experience necessary to excel in the position. Leadership has already had conversations as to why and how this role will meet the organization's needs. There may be an unspoken assumption regarding how difficult this job will be. The leadership of the organization understands that the diversity practitioner will experience an emotional toll, yet it is unlikely that measures are put into place to cope with this extra burden. Because the diversity professional is in a leadership position, the authority of that position needs to be assessed. The management of the organization may wish to examine the importance and effectiveness of symbolic representation at the elected or senior decision-making administrative level for this position (Murray, 2017). Multiple voices within the organization have been incorporated into the

hiring process to successfully identify a candidate who is reflective of the institution's values, mission, and philosophy. The offer is made and accepted and the diversity practitioner is employed. Now what?

An organization that seeks a diversity practitioner, one who is charged with creating a more equitable work environment, is more than likely to communicate intentionally in their marketing, advertising, website, brochure, and other promotional materials that they value diversity. The hiring of a diversity professional itself may lack genuineness as the institution strives to communicate a value in diversity (Griffin, Hart, Worthington, Belay, & Yeung, 2019). Sometimes their effort to communicate the importance of diversity manifests through the photos that appear in the marketing materials, with blended groups of people by both ethnicity and gender. As prospective employees research the organization, they may make assumptions about the working conditions and the perceived favorability surrounding diversity (Windscheid, Bowes-Sperry, Jens-Mazei, & Morner, 2017). This perception may be real, but it may also be artificial.

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold. First, it examines the ways in which an institution and its leadership can set up a diversity practitioner for success. The employer may have thought about the impact to the organization once the practitioner is in place, but may not have considered what measures need to be in place in order for this to happen. Depending on the circumstances surrounding the hiring of a diversity practitioner, the development of the role may or may not be fully researched and developed. What systems and mechanisms need to be in place to support the work and the role? This chapter explores these necessary components.

Second, this chapter focuses on the practitioner's overall well-being. How is the person in this role sustained? There is usually a high level of emotional distress associated with this role, particularly from people with marginalized social identities and members of underrepresented groups in predominantly White institutions, and additional responsibilities and expectations typically exist outside of the job description. The diversity practitioner may be sought out for any aspect of the workplace that involves marginalized groups. He/she may also be utilized for oral and written communication, conflict resolution, human resource policies and procedures, and overall support for people of color. He/she will probably be expected to be a spokesperson of sorts to speak on behalf of the organization. The diversity practitioner is a public relations representative to help uplift the organization's reputation.

The role of the diversity professional involves many tasks and responsibilities. Part of the role is to problem-solve, respond to conflict, and provide resolution in sometimes contentious situations. Often times, the limited number of employees in underrepresented groups positions the employee to be over-burdened in carrying the psychological weight of all people of color. Unfair professional standards can also place an emotional toll (Steele, 2018). This chapter communicates the steps the institution should take in developing culturally proficient employees and ways the institution will be held accountable. It is important for the employer to retain consistency in the retention of a successful practitioner. The building of relationships and the establishment of trust requires time. If the practitioner leaves the position, a new practitioner may need to start from square one and begin the work all over again. It is to the institution's advantage to retain an effective diversity practitioner. Those who do diversity work are undervalued (Ahmed, 2012); they rarely receive a trophy, a banner, or other sign of achievement. It is thankless work. Nonetheless, if the practitioner is not sustained in the work, the practitioner will be exhausted and unfulfilled. He/she will not thrive, nor will he/she achieve the results needed. Often times, people in this role have a personal connection to DEI. They have either experienced a lack of equitable circumstances for their own identification in a marginalized group, or they have recognized they have benefitted from a level of privilege their own identity and experience has brought them (Wilson, 2013).

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