RETAINING A DIVERSE WORKFORCE
Briefing Sheet

ISSUE SUMMARY

Successful and productive organizations are those that foster a culture that purposefully seeks out, welcomes, and supports peoples' differences and where employees are engaged in creating and sustaining such a culture. Employee engagement leads to retention. Inclusive work environments that recognize and welcome diverse perspectives foster and facilitate employee engagement. Inclusivity requires intention and explicit purpose. Meet each employee where they are, maintain open and sustained lines of communication, and support the employee in being successful at work. The following initiatives benefit both the individual employee and the organization.

Initiatives	Employee	Organization
Stay Interviews	*Increases sense of connectivity and develops trust, respect, and understanding*	*Provides insight into employee's engagement and satisfaction level, strengths and areas for improvement*
Employee Resource and Affinity Groups	*Provides a network and community of other employees with shared characteristics, experiences and goals.*	*Fosters cohesion throughout organization, provides communication channel for senior leadership with members of ERG, increases cultural awareness throughout the company*
Tough / Crucial Conversations	*Provides a "safe" space of mutual respect and mutual purpose where constructive criticism can be provided and received*	*Increases effectiveness of manager communications with staff and peer, decreases likelihood of miscommunication or missed opportunities*
Work-Life Balance Programs (e.g., flextime and remote working)	*Emphasizes employer's recognition and commitment to the employee's well-being and the "whole person"*	*Increases employee and overall organizational productivity and sense of community.*
Individual Development Plans	*Provides a structured career path and skills development plan; helps employee feel valued*	*Optimizes enhancement of individual employee's sense of belonging and growth potential within the organization; enhances employee's productivity*
Exit Interviews	*Provides an opportunity for departing employee to leave with a positive impression of the company.*	*Assists in evaluating the overall employee experience within the organization and identifying opportunities to improve both retention and engagement.*

RESOURCES TO EXPLORE

1. Unconscious bias and/or DEI training courses for managers and leaders

2. Diversity networks – both employee resource groups inside the organization (e.g., a Women's or LGBTQ+ Network) and external ones (e.g., Leadership Council on Legal Diversity)

3. Mentorship and Sponsorship programs

4. Organizational peer groups and associations that incorporate a DEI focus and innovations for a specific population or industry (e.g., Catalyst, which focuses on women in the workplace; The Diversity Lab, which focuses on the legal profession)

5. Follow and apply DEI retention metrics and benchmarking (e.g., McKinsey report: Delivering Through Diversity, January 2018; Harvard Business Review articles on DEI and retention, such as To Retain Employees, Focus on Inclusion – Not Just Diversity, Karen Brown, December 4, 2018, and To Build a Diverse Company for the Long Term, Develop Junior Talent, Matt Sigelman and Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., April 12, 2021)

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER – FOR THE ORGANIZATION

1. Does your company culture assume that – or focus on teaching – that all individuals should adapt to the company culture, or does it encourage individuals to come to work as their authentic selves?

2. Is someone assigned to support the onboarding and integration of new hires, and to work with all staff (including those from underrepresented groups) to develop annual goals and corresponding development plans?

3. Does the company measure and track DEI progress (including which programs garner the most impact), follow and evaluate itself against DEI benchmarks, and examine where the gaps are? How does it evaluate utilization and success of its DEI initiatives?

4. Does the company advertise open positions internally before going public so as to encourage, develop and promote employees from diverse backgrounds, if available?

5. Does the company make public statements about its positions on DEI issues?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER – FOR THE EMPLOYEE

1.   Do the company's stated values reflect the importance it places on DEI and can it articulate the value that DEI brings to the company?

2.   Does the company leadership and management reflect diversity?

3.   What initiatives and programs does the company have to purposefully create an inclusive culture?

4.   Is data on the company's diversity readily available?

5.   Does DEI have a role in performance metrics?

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1.   Employees who can show up authentically at work are more satisfied with their jobs and are easier to retain. In order to build a rewarding employee experience, you need to understand what matters to your people.

2.   The vast majority of employees decide to stay or leave a company within the first six months of their employment. In turn, effective onboarding is crucial to retention.

3.   Employee retention is essential if you want diversity at higher levels of the organization.

4.   Check for pay parity. Make sure minorities are being paid the same as non-minorities for the same work.

5.   Diversity comes from the top. Companies don't have a problem recruiting talented people from diverse backgrounds. Any company that claims to have challenges finding minorities for roles should broaden their network and consider things they can do to expand their network, such as recruiting at HBCUs, joining diversity organizations, etc. But one of the best retention tools is for lower employees to see people at the top who look like them. Consider Mansfield Rule or other initiatives to boost diversity at the higher levels of any organization.

ACTIONS TO TAKE

1. Be amazing at onboarding employees. Start even before they arrive by announcing new hires and giving their backgrounds, roles, and responsibilities. These internal company announcements will send a clear message that they are welcome and that you have put time and thought into their arrival. Then, give them a well-respected and knowledgeable onboarding buddy to help them navigate the company culture and get acclimated. Make sure new employees get proper training, and that they understand the company's clear and realistic expectations for them.

2. Invest in employee development and career growth. Know the strengths and ambitions of each employee and offer their opportunities to upgrade their skills. Help them create individual development plans. Make sure they know what opportunities are available and what competencies they need to develop to reach the next level.

3. Connect the employee with mentors and advocates. Employees appreciate an environment where they feel encouraged by their managers, colleagues, and company leaders. Connect employees with mentors who will advocate for their success, development, and progression – both inside the company and in other venues related to their professions. Mentorship and sponsorship programs have proved especially effective in creating and maintaining transparent communication channels across every level of the organization.

4. Hold dedicated, regular one-on-ones of managers and their employees that include 360 feedback to the employee and two-way feedback between the manager and the employee. The organization should also support employees' having "one over" meetings to ensure their engagement is expanded beyond just their relationship with their direct supervisor.

5. Develop a formalized retention strategy. Stay interviews - aimed at identifying and reinforcing the positive reasons for employees, especially those from diverse backgrounds, to stay - are one of the easiest tools to implement and most effective ways to encourage employees to stay. Stay interviews also give employees the opportunity to share what's working for them, as well as their perceptions of what could be done to improve the overall workplace culture. Make sure the company's "high potential" program incorporate DEI elements.

IMPEDIMENTS TO SUCCESS

1.   Lack of top-down/bottom-up commitment to DEI. Lack of buy-in and support from the top, as well as executive leadership and middle management. The leadership of the organization at all levels must be committed to strive for a diverse and inclusive environment and culture and to hold themselves accountable.

2.   Not feeling valued. When employees do not feel welcome or that they belong.

3.   Lack of or disingenuous feedback. Sharing honest feedback with a manager can be scary for employees, so it's important that managers ensure they make their employees feel comfortable with the thought of sharing their honest opinion.

4.   Lack of opportunities to develop and grow, and lack of internal networks.

5.   Lack of clear processes or resources to respond appropriately to allegations of discrimination. How a company deals with complaints is critical to reassure minority employees that the company hears them and cares about their (and their colleagues') well-being. Follow-up with the complainant is key. At a minimum, companies should: promptly and fairly investigate the allegations; make a determination on whether the allegations are substantiated or unsubstantiated; take prompt and effective corrective action(s), if necessary; inform the complainant that the investigation has been completed and encourage them to come back if there are any further issues; and, if necessary, have a meeting with the whole team reminding them about policies and respect in the workplace.