

THE DARDEN PERSPECTIVE

IN
First Person



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Leveraging Difference Can Make A Difference.



Making diversity work is not just about problem solving, it's about learning. And one thing I've learned from my research and consulting about diversity efforts is that they often fail for the same reason. See if any of this sounds familiar.

Does your organization invest time and money in diversity efforts without real results? A diversity recruitment function, a minority- and women-owned vendor function, some target marketing, a diversity awareness course everyone sits through, some community relations activity. It all sounds good, right? But your business still has difficulty attracting talent that would increase workforce diversity as well as increase diversity at upper management and executive levels.

In 15 years of working with business leaders to solve these problems, my colleagues and I have learned that there is a better approach. One that would stop the constant stream of complaints landing in your office. One that builds energy and learning in the organization and helps people strategically link diversity and organizational goals to produce

clear results. It is called Leveraging Difference.

The key to leveraging difference is cycling through three simple but powerful steps: paying attention to the differences that matter to your business (seeing difference), gaining knowledge about how those differences matter (understanding difference), and experimenting with changes in how you do business as a result of the differences (valuing difference). By moving through the cycle, you generate change in your organization and in your people.

By leveraging difference you use a new set of questions to drive innovation in decision making. A larger and more diverse group of stakeholders are engaged. Momentum and enthusiasm spreads contagiously and you position your organization to leverage other differences in the future.

Leveraging difference versus simply managing diversity is more than just semantics. It is proactive strategic thinking versus reactive problem solving. It's actually something that's affected the way I do business and teach at Darden. Now that's what I call powerful learning.
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