



ask a pro

We're all striving to reach that highly sought after "next level" in life: be it work, family, community, personal growth, whatever is on your radar. And sometimes it helps to Ask a Pro for a little advice along the way...

Q: I've been with my company for 5 years and find it to be a great place to work. My employer actively recruits a diverse work force, however people of color don't stay around for more than 1-2 years. Am I missing something? Should I consider leaving?

-Anonymous
Cincinnati, OH

A: According to Jatrine Bentsi-Enchill, J.D., CPCC, President, InSite Corporate Coaching & Training:

Keep in mind that everyone has a different opinion of what makes a company "a great place to work". The work environment has a huge impact on whether a company can retain a diverse work force. Determine whether your organization has created an inclusive environment where diversity is not only accepted and valued but also viewed as a significant strength of the organization. Absent this level of commitment, recruitment efforts will prove to be a waste of time.

Companies that are successful with building and retaining a diverse workforce recognize that it is imperative to develop a "top down" commitment to creating a racially and culturally competent work environment. The commitment needs to be initiated, supported and modeled by the leadership of the organization. In consulting with clients, I work with the organization to ensure that the commitment is included as a high priority item within the organization's strategic plan. In addition, we devise a clear evaluation component whereby diversity related outcomes are clearly defined along with a system for evaluating overall progress.

If you really want to help your organization, then I also recommend that you get involved. Perhaps you can assist with the implementation of an ongoing strategy designed to consistently demonstrate and communicate that diversity in the workplace is highly valued. Not only diversity of race, culture, religion and sexual orientation but also behavior, communication and inter-

personal styles. This should be an ongoing training process (versus a 1-day diversity training blitz), to:

- Determine what assumptions people have about others that may be mistaken.
- Challenge assumptions about others that might adversely influence their own behavior and relationships with others.
- Gain a solid understanding of attitudes and opinions about diversity issues.
- Understand how certain behavior and personal views affect the work environment.
- Create a common language fostering open, honest communication about diversity issues.
- Express dissenting opinions without fear of disapproval or causing offense.
- Commit to co-creating a receptive and accepting work environment.

Creating a work environment where members of diverse backgrounds can work together is an attainable goal but it is not something that can occur over night. With the proper commitment, consistent training and coaching, organizations can successfully create an inclusive well functioning organization.

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"Ask the Pro" is an advice and coaching column. All responses are provided by industry leaders and subject matter experts in their field and certified professional coaches. Email your questions to askthepro@urbaninfluence.com

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