

Add a Teaspoon of Diversity and Stir

It's thought-provoking that cultural diversity is a hot topic in board meetings and that there are teams within companies whose job it is to increase the workplace numbers of women, people with indigenous backgrounds or those from other cultures.

It may seem to some that we celebrate cultural diversity, but is this just a political agenda? Or are we a society that really believes in and embraces equality in the workplace?

Why do some companies need diversity KPI's?

Is it a performance issue and companies struggle to find people of colour or women with the same skill sets as men?

The diversity issue can't be solved with anecdotal solutions that tend to increase awareness from time to time, like a hit of caffeine.

For managers, leaders and HR professionals, it should always be at the forefront of one's mind and it starts with changing company culture with a top-down approach.

But don't get me wrong, it makes little sense to "get the diversity balance right" just to satisfy the numbers.

You need to get it right because there is value in having a diverse workforce.

To appoint a person to a position (or promote them) simply because they balance the demographic books by virtue of race or gender or any other criterion is a false value system that is condescending and bordering on being insulting.

Use the person best suited to the job – for their sake as much as the company's. Give the contract to the person who best matches the job description.

Better still: create opportunities where natural motivation and inclination (diversity) can flourish.

From my own experience, I can tell you that being a company's pin-up girl showed me the other side of diversity. Being promoted, beyond my capability at the time, had a detrimental effect not only on my career but also on my personal growth.

A toxic work environment coupled with unrealistic work pressures quickly led to burnout and attempted suicide.

In a recent survey of conference attendants, 47% confirmed they had experienced some sort of harassment during the course of their career; 13 % said yes but didn't report it, and 19% of the audience said maybe, but I am not sure.

Creating a diverse workplace is a noble act but unless we tackle the ugly side of it and really delve deep into the issues that create a contaminated workplace, it will all have been in vain and will have had the reverse effect.

With the current infrastructure boom and the influx of new people joining the rail and construction industry, you need to make sure your onboarding systems are aligned and you have a framework in place that will set them up for success.

The alternative will be a diverse workforce with a poor mental state, which ultimately leads to a high attrition rate.

Diversity is not a numbers game and while we support the notion that we should treat people like humans and not 'Key Performance Indicators', a formal education and mentorship framework is what's missing, so what are organisations going to do to improve diversity and sustainability in their workforce?

If you are considering a career change or genuinely interested in the opportunity to train as a safety professional, or work in the rail and infrastructure industry, then Alium Works would love to hear from you.

Alium Works provides specialised training and mentoring for mothers returning to work. We work with major industry and leading companies day to day, enabling us to promote an equal opportunity for those who have a desire to develop their career.

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