



The Network Newsletter

The Workplace Diversity Network: A Project of Cornell University IIR and The National Conference

1997 Spring Forum Success: An Exceptional Learning and Networking Experience

The members of the Workplace Diversity Network who gathered in Louisville, Kentucky between May 28 and May 31 for the 1997 Network Spring Forum enjoyed an exceptionally stimulating, challenging and collaborative learning experience. The theme of the Forum was “Communicating the Commitment” and sessions explored the various ways organizations can and should communicate their commitment to diversity to internal and external constituencies.

Fourteen participants came from large corporations, small businesses and not-for-profit organizations to engage acclaimed consultants Elsie Y. Cross and David Tulin, and human relations experts from The National Conference, around the critical issues of intent versus behavior in the workplace; the fabric and impact of social oppression; the business rationale for diversity initiatives; welcoming persons with disabilities to the workplace; and the process of dismantling racism among corporate and community leaders. While the dialogue between participants and speakers was excellent, the dialogue among the participants themselves was equally substantive. In their written evaluations of the Forum, participants indicated that they came away with concrete knowledge, new insights and perhaps most importantly, solid relationships of support and collaboration with one another.

Under separate cover, Network organizations which did not participate in the Spring Forum will receive the complete Forum resource book. This Network Newsletter is designed to inform the contents of the resource book by briefly summarizing the highlights of the 1997 Spring Forum.

***Communicating the Commitment through
Community and Business Leaders:
The Dismantling Racism Project of The
National Conference, Saint Louis Region
Maggie Potapchuk, The National Conference***

The 1997 Spring Forum began with an unusual luncheon discussion. Each participant was invited to share a “diversity moment” – an experience during which his or her commitment to and involvement with diversity issues had a significant

impact. The experiences ranged widely from the personal to the professional and served to foster a sense of community and kinship among participants. The luncheon discussion prepared the group to engage the first Forum presenter, Ms. Maggie Potapchuk of The National Conference, Saint Louis Region. Maggie directs the *Dismantling Racism Project*, the centerpiece of a larger regional initiative known as **CommUnity – Saint Louis**. The *Dismantling Racism Project* is a comprehensive process of education and activism to prepare selected

community and corporate leaders to break down racist systems and create new community structures which incorporate, respect and value racial and cultural diversity.

The mission of the **CommUnity – Saint Louis** initiative is to “dismantle individual, cultural and institutional racism by establishing and maintaining programs that increase multiracial awareness and cross-cultural competency, initiate collaborative relationships, promote mutual understanding and respect among all people, and develop inclusive organizations.” Maggie described how the *Dismantling Racism Project* develops a network of people who have been trained to address racism on personal, cultural and institutional levels. Once trained, these individuals become change agents in their spheres of influence.

The educational process begins with an intensive, highly personalized six-day *Institute for Dismantling Racism* which involves 28 participants. The Institute focuses on one’s own role in the system of oppression based on race. As participants learn the dynamics of this system and their individual roles in it, they begin to understand their own personal dynamic for change. A highlight of this learning experience is a segment known as “A Day in the Life of a Change Agent” which is designed to prepare participants to challenge and reconstruct oppressive systems in the various institutions within which people have roles (e.g., family,

Rita Hardiman of the University of Massachusetts.

Included in the Forum resource notebook is a detailed description of the vision, mission, goals, objectives and strategies of **CommUnity – Saint Louis** and its centerpiece program, the *Institute for Dismantling Racism*. Maggie’s presentation provoked thoughtful discussion and inquiry among Forum participants. She is willing to discuss the project in detail with others who may wish to replicate the effort in their own communities.

Communicating the Commitment to Resisters and Allies

David Tulin, President and Lead Trainer, Tulin DiversiTeam Associates

David Tulin spoke directly to the connection between diversity and organizational excellence, defining diversity as a matter of organizational competency. “Diversity is about everyone and that includes white men. It’s not about political correctness, not about sensitivity.” In David’s view, when thinking about workplace diversity, the appropriate “PC” is professional competency. It’s not a voluntary matter anymore. Working with resisters and allies, David recommended identifying diversity as a critical business issue, linking it with organizational goals and developing ways to eliminate behaviors which frustrate goal achievement.

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educational setting, workplace, religious community, civic groups). Upon completing the Institute, participants are required to make a two-year volunteer commitment to support the mission of **CommUnity – Saint Louis** by providing 20 hours of volunteer time per year. These volunteer hours support the objectives and strategies of the larger CommUnity – Saint Louis social change effort, which is based on the social change model developed by Bailey Jackson and

In approaching diversity as a business issue, David distinguished three concepts: intent, behavior and impact. *Intent* is how or what a person “means” by behaving in a certain way. *Behavior* is what a person actually does. *Impact* is how the action affects a person, group or organization. David recommends a change strategy focused on behavior and impact, rather than intent. Prejudice, bias and stereotyping leak into the way people behave such that the impact of that behavior has negative consequences for the

organization. Change is achieved through connecting behaviors with impact and linking that to organizational goals. "People change external factors first before a (value) transformation."

Diversity change may be threatening. It is likely to cause anxiety and discomfort. David's approach: "People have a right to feel discomfort, but they don't have a right to let that disrupt organizational goals." This distinction is critical to the development of a process that has the desired impact. David's goal: to assist organizations in the development of *multicultural competence*, defined as a set of behaviors, attitudes, information and/or policies that enable an individual or organization to function effectively in a multicultural environment.

Identifying organizational advantages and measurement is important and doable. David suggested a number of "diversity competitive pay-offs" -- cost savings, conflict identification and resolution, the advantage of recruiting and retaining "the brightest and the best" that comes with being an "employer of choice," marketing, creativity, problem-solving, system flexibility, productivity and quality. One company he worked with introduced women in a formerly male department. The work involved use of 30 pound jack hammers, which were too heavy for the women. In response, the company was motivated to find a lighter, 15 pound jack hammer. It's eventual adoption across the department, men and women, reduced back injuries by 80%.

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"That's a measure of diversity."

David shared his insight and experience linking the business case for diversity with a behavior/impact change model. His presentation informed the discussion of intent versus behavior change strategies, which continued throughout the Forum. Extensive supportive materials are included in the resource notebooks.

Communicating a Comprehensive Effort to Build Inclusion in a Diverse Workplace

Elsie Y. Cross, President and CEO, Elsie Y. Cross Associates, Inc.

Elsie Cross began her keynote session with an unexpected statement: "My work is not about diversity and inclusion. These terms are cop-outs for the real issues. The fundamental goal of my work is *integration*." Forum participants immediately sought a definition for integration, which Elsie explained as the identification and removal of systemic barriers that prevent groups of individuals within an organization from performing and achieving at their highest levels. The removal of barriers creates an environment in which individuals are fully integrated on personal and professional levels.

While many diversity professionals choose not to delve into issues of oppression and systemic discrimination, Elsie has made these the central focus of her educational efforts. She encourages her clients to employ Kurt Lewin's Force Field Analysis to determine what factors will remove barriers and provide momentum toward the goal of integration and which factors will hinder progression toward the goal. To support this exploration, Elsie has designed the Oppression Matrix, a visual depiction of the divisive swath oppression and oppressive systems cut across an organization. The horizontal axis is gender; the vertical axis is race. When oppression cuts diagonally across these categories, we see how white women and men of color inhabit dual worlds

of privilege and oppression, one based on race and the other based on gender. We see also how white men and women of color reside at the poles: white men in privilege based on race and gender and women of color in oppression based on race and gender. Elsie employs this visual imagery not only to explain the function of oppression but to identify common experiences that can serve as the source for new alliances to achieve integration: white women and men of color; white men and women of color.

The Oppression Matrix and Elsie's insistence on the goal of integration, as opposed to inclusion or diversity, generated vigorous discussion and dialogue among Forum participants. How do organizations respond to the notion of integration? Are they resistant to the concept of oppression? What about white men? Elsie responded by delineating the steps she follows to guide her interventions with organizations.

Phase One

- 1) Get the unequivocal support of the CEO and his or her direct reports by making the case for lost human potential, resources, creativity and the cost of replacing employees.
- 2) Conduct a thorough assessment of the organization using focus groups; survey data; and HR demographics and statistics. Protect confidentiality by gathering perceptual data that describe employee perceptions of the work environment, keep it anonymous and offer it in summative, report form. Do not provide raw data. Remember that assessment

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data are critical for bench marking success.

- 3) Create a representative group of individuals who will lead the effort and serve as early champions of the effort. This group may be a Diversity Council or Diversity Task Force.
- 4) Create awareness of issues through experiential workshop education. Be sure to help participants understand what the issues have to do with their organization. Be sure to have a mechanism for reporting workshop recommendations.
- 5) Work with Diversity Council (CEO and CFO especially) to help them become diversity champions. The Diversity Council is the body that receives workshop recommendations; creates vision for change; and establishes organizational plans. Diversity champions are responsible for

supporting the initiative beyond the President or CEO. Elsie also underscored the importance of having white males among the diversity champions so they can be supported by their Diversity Council allies to use their "white male" power to effect change.

Phase Two

In Phase Two, Elsie focuses on capacity-building within the organization. Capacity-building requires the transference of knowledge and skills. As an example of effective capacity-building, Elsie cited a client who released 30 professionals to spend 8 months at full salary learning to become change agents and DTCs (Diversity Trainers and Consultants). The education and replication of skilled, committed individuals within the organization clearly serves to solidify prospects for successful organizational change.

In this phase, Elsie also recommended that the HR director be positioned as a key *facilitator of change*; however, she insisted, it is critical that the overall initiative be driven by line

management, perhaps in partnership with Human Resources. She noted also that it is critical to establish incentives and accountability to support and strengthen the initiative.

Elsie provided a written description of her intervention steps which is available for perusal in the Forum resource notebook.

Communicating A Commitment to Persons with Disabilities In Your Workplace Pat Gleich, The National Conference, Kentuckiana Region

Pat Gleich, Executive Director of the Kentuckiana Region of The National Conference, brought her considerable experience as an educator and trainer to bear on this conversation about welcoming persons with disabilities to the

workplace and including them as full participants. In her training programs, Pat recasts the **ADA** (Americans with Disabilities Act) to mean *Appreciating Different Abilities*. In this context, her training prepares organizations to understand the particular dynamics of disability/ability as they are perceived by those individuals who are differently-abled.

Pat explored the struggle between *humanity* and *bureaucracy* that challenges many organizations as they attempt to include differently-abled persons in their workforce. She acknowledged that communication, both written and verbal, functions as an essential factor in the hierarchy of disability treatment. Organizations are often more willing to include individuals who have mobility impairments but are able to communicate with verbal and written language than they are people who are visually impaired or deaf.

Pat encouraged Forum participants to view reasonable accommodation within an *expense vs. value* paradigm. Is the relative expense of accommodation — whether it’s adapting a work station, providing interpreters or a Braille computer, allowing flexible work hours and locations to accommodate the needs of a person who has a chronic, progressive illness—equal to the value which that individual (or those individuals) provide in the workplace? Pat supported her presentation with a collection of printed resources which are included in the Forum resource book.

explore challenging questions

- *Provide exposure to ideas of leading figures and consultants in the field, in the context of small group discussion*
- *Provoke thought and expand knowledge*

One noteworthy observation from Louisville serves as an example. During Pat’s session on the ADA, discussion turned to the implications for diversity best practice offered by the procedural specifications of the ADA, as compared to EEO/AA, and highlighted what we’ve learned about making diversity work.

Consider the diversity learning embodied in the reasonable accommodation process. By requiring consultation with the person with the disability, the ADA explicitly acknowledges individual differences and disallows the “one accommodation fits all” stereotype. Reasonable accommodations provide a clear demonstration that “there’s more than one way of doing things.” Working successfully with differently abled members of the workforce can help build an organization’s capacity to encompass difference, rather than impose assimilation, a central quality of inclusion. It’s interesting to consider if the ADA goes a step beyond earlier anti-discrimination legislation by more explicitly promoting organizational culture change focused on humanity, rather than bureaucracy.

Advance Notice -- The 1997 Fall Forum is being planned for the week of November 17, 1997. Mark your calendars. Details coming soon!

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 Tammy Bormann, The National Conference, 202/206-0006
 Susan Woods, Cornell University ILR, 716/852-4191

Closing Thoughts

The 1997 Spring Forum brought to life the unique advantages gained through participation in The Workplace Diversity Network -- the opportunity to:

- *Exchange ideas one-on-one with diversity change leaders from organizations across the country and develop professional rapport*
- *Identify current and emerging issues in diversity work and enjoy a discussion environment designed to*