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Different, yet the same

Companies' success based on common employee goals

Most people hear the word "diversity" and think one thing when it pertains to the workplace — ethnicity. But race and ethnic background are only a fraction of what diversity really entails.

California is teeming with a diverse population. Los Angeles especially is home to people from all over the world. In fact, the city's distinct population is one of the many things that draw residents to this area. Similarly, companies of any size or industry thrive on having a varied group of employees.



Gallagher

According to BJ Gallagher, an L.A.-based diversity consultant and author of "A Peacock in the Land of Penguins: A Fable About Creativity and Courage" (Berrett-Koehler, \$16.95), businesses care about diversity for three reasons: customer relations, creativity and compliance.

Customer Relations

"Other organizations feel that their employee diversity should reflect their customer diversity to ensure that the organization's goods and services meet the needs of their diverse customers," Gallagher says. "Good customer relations should make the organization more money."

Now more than ever, society is demanding companies to reflect the culture around them. Think of the outrage if a business opened in Koreatown with non-Korean speaking staff. Literally speaking the same language as the consumer is an integral part of a diverse workplace — especially for a city where two percent of the country's Korean population lives.

Creativity

"A few progressive organizations have moved beyond compliance and customer issues; these businesses understand that diverse perspectives, thinking patterns, and insights will ensure that the business doesn't suffer from the blind spots characterized by too much homogeneity in the workforce," adds Gallagher.

"Tapping into the creativity of diversity will make the organization good money. Longo Toyota, a big dealership in L.A., is a great example of this mindset, with emphasis on learning from differences, capitalizing on creative new ways to do things, and relating to all customers regardless of race, gender or age."

Even the most conservative of companies rely on the creativity of its staff for a variety of reasons. The



Most smart companies embrace diversity instead of treating it as if it's requirement or burden.

biggest — and most obvious — reason is tapping into employees' creativity to think of new ways to make the company more money. And as many executives will tell you, it takes an eclectic group of individuals with varied backgrounds to make that possible.

Compliance

To this day, discrimination is still an issue in the workplace. Good companies know that job candidates should be chosen based on their excellence and ability to meet and exceed their job duties — not the color of their skin.

"Some organizations pay attention to diversity because they want to make sure they are in compliance with the law," says Gallagher. "They don't want to be punished for discriminating against groups of employees or customers because of race, gender, age, sexual orientation, etc. Lack of compliance will cost the organization big money. The LAPD is an example of this type of organization."

Whatever the situation, there's no doubt that diversity will always be a big part of American businesses. It's what our country was founded on, so why not celebrate it?