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Why Including Hispanics is 'Mission Critical'

Opinion: Proper Hispanic Representation on Committees or Task Forces is Vital

With the increasing number of Hispanics joining the work force, corporate leaders are constantly looking for innovative ways to address their issues. Some companies form committees or task forces to evaluate key issues and provide viable options. Committee members are usually selected based upon their individual qualifications and relevant expertise. If necessary and if budgets permit, they also tap on outside consultants.

Allowing a committee to do your thinking makes a lot of sense. But what happens if the member selection process is flawed? Sometimes budgets are tight and committee members are selected based upon availability rather than their ability to identify and solve problems. For example, in the case of committees formed to address Hispanic issues, it is not uncommon to find that most committee members have little or no knowledge of Hispanic issues and concerns. What then?

At a regional bank in upstate New York, the CEO appointed his top lending officer to become the head of their multi-cultural initiative. His mandate was to hire and train more Spanish-speaking Hispanics from the same communities the bank served. Months passed and progress was slow. Left with unanswered questions, the CEO asked his newly appointed Diversity Officer to lead a task force to evaluate the issues and provide recommendations. The task force included other senior members from the bank who had limited knowledge of Hispanic cultures. Their findings showed that there was no problem within the bank but rather the market was slow to respond due to *'outside factors'*. When asked why there were no Hispanics on the task force, the response was mixed. Off-record, one member shared that he feared losing his job to a Hispanic and therefore had little motivation to include their input.

At a prestigious school in Westchester, New York, the headmaster formed various committees to explore ways to leverage the growing diversity among their student body. Committee members were encouraged to attend national conferences on diversity and implement a list of newly acquired ideas. When the roster of committee members was shown to the parents, one attendee noted that their committees lacked a member with a native Hispanic background. He asked, *"Without proper Hispanic representation, how could a committee develop viable solutions to leverage the diversity among Hispanic students?"*

Both corporate and academic leaders tend to believe that a group of bright minds can solve any problem. But when it comes to solving issues concerning Hispanics, both tend to omit a key component, namely, Hispanic representation within their committees. The reason goes beyond the issue of fairness. Hispanic representation is vital to successfully evaluate complex issues from a Latino perspective. With more than 30 cultures represented under the Hispanic category, having someone who can navigate and appreciate the diversity among Hispanic cultures is not just a good idea but *'mission critical'*.

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