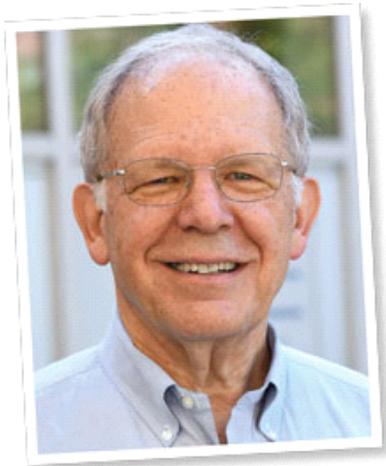


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The Best Person for the Job

Bill McCurry



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Before leaving office, California governor Jerry Brown signed a bill requiring female representation on boards of the state's publicly-traded corporations. An extremely competent and experienced female executive confided she'd been respected based on skill and performance. "Now I'm not an equal. I've been referred to as 'our token' or 'our box-checked' director. I went from an executive retained on merit to just a token. Does anyone see the downside?"

At McCurry Companies, we hired a young college graduate in 1953 when women were turned away because "you'll be married, pregnant and gone in a couple years." Helen Ikenoyama was with us for 47 years while raising two children. We broke through two biases and were richly rewarded.

Diversity is a politically charged word. Debate it and you're tagged a racist if your opinions don't square with 2019 political correctness. Let's all take a

deep breath.

Businesses, especially small businesses, need the best people they can find. The more diversity you have on your team the more likely you are to generate exciting new and different ideas. Don't let discrimination (regardless of whether that bias is race, gender, orientation, disability, etc.) keep you from hiring the best candidates. If current staff has a problem with biases, then it's time for training or personnel changes.

Consider the customer base you want to attract, rather than the base you currently have. Look around. Our industry appears to have more older white males than Washington, especially in management. How will that affect our future growth? I doubt your customer base is all elderly white males, so why should your team reflect only that group? Ask the serious question: Are those we recently hired the best possible people for us or only the best of those who applied?

To find diversity in ideas and skill sets requires you to change how you look for new employees. One retailer watches for serious shoppers who represent a different background than his current workforce. He introduces himself, thanks them for shopping in his store and engages in conversation. If appropriate, he hands the person two business cards. "Please keep one card should you ever need to reach me for anything. We're always looking for good people to join our team. Please give the second card to anyone you think would be a great employee and would like to work with us." It's likely the person will give the second card to someone from their ethnic group, gender or classification, but almost never to an older white male. This is a great marketing strategy because it builds customer relationships. It's also a fantastic recruiting technique.

If you have no minority employees, how do you anticipate finding new applicants from minority groups? Probably they aren't streaming in your front door. People tend to stay in their comfort zones. You'll need to seek out applicants who can bring a different perspective to your business and change how you communicate with customers. Advertise in new areas and in media outlets that reach minority communities. Partner with schools of all types by sponsoring horticulture clubs. Not only will those parents be your newest customers, but those kids could be future employees. Different isn't bad, it's just different. It's expansive, educational and it's good business.

When you focus on skills, regardless of gender, ethnicity, race, etc., you'll grow a team that brings to work varied and invaluable perspectives, ideas and experiences. Allow their differences to grow and thrive as they attract new employees and customers to your store. **GP**

Bill would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future columns. Please contact him at wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com or (609) 688-1169.