

## Challenges come with opportunities

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### PALM BEACH COUNTY

**Harmasco, a manufacturer of liquid filtration products, is trying to create a bridge between the cultures in Palm Beach County.**

**HARMSCO**  
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When human resources director Linda Pena started with the company about five years ago, she saw an opportunity to grow Harmasco by capitalizing on the influx of Hispanics moving into the West Palm Beach area.

"We were getting about 50 applications per day of people who spoke very little English looking for employment," she said.

Those applicants, Pena notes, who were doctors, lawyers and teachers in their native countries, were looking to establish themselves in the United States.

Rather than looking solely at language ability, Harmasco hires qualified candidates and works to build a bridge between cultures.

"The barrier is language, not skill," she said. "Think about all the talent and knowledge we would miss out on if we did not find a way to close that gap."

To conquer that challenge, Harmasco offers a variety of language, cultural sensitivity and training classes during work hours.

To build the bridge between cultures and overcome the language barriers, Harmasco brought in a professor to teach department managers basic Spanish and another to teach Spanish-speaking employees English.

"The mentality is, we're all a team and we need to help each other," she said. "By having both sides understand each other, we can communicate. And, it creates an enhanced relationship between manager and employee."

Today, about two-thirds of Harmasco's 100 employees are Hispanic.

Pena said her company has only benefited from its diversity program.

"The greatest loss to any company that does not make diversity a priority — whether it is gender, age or ethnicity — is the talent and skills a diverse group of people bring to the table," she said.

— Aleissia C. Gillespie

to have a company that is equally diverse," said Camilo Cruz, CEO of Plantation-based Taller del Exito, a leading training and motivational company in Latin America and in the U.S. Hispanic market. "By creating a diverse workforce, companies are able to learn how to appeal to their target market from a customer satisfaction perspective, marketing perspective, etc."

A variety of viewpoints and backgrounds helps to shape a stronger company overall — one that has more tentacles into various business markets and a better understanding of its customers. In a business climate where technology and pricing have become a level playing field, often the only defining competitive advantage is customer service and customer satisfaction.

"Companies can embrace diversity and expand their reach into other markets or they can sit back and watch their competition do so," said Cruz, who has been asked to provide insight to thousands of top corporations and political leaders worldwide.

Miami-based marketing communications agency Beber Silverstein Group depends on diversity to reach more business markets and understand their audiences.

"We live in a multi-ethnic polyglot economy and the ability to understand the various populations to whom we are directing our messages to is a necessity," said co-founder Elaine Silverstein.

### Translating diversity into dollars

How does diversity translate into dollars? Through the ability to gain greater market share, customer loyalty and increased productivity, Cruz finds that although some companies may not appreciate having to deal with the various modes of communication or work styles resulting from diversity, they do appreciate increasing bottom line revenue.

He recommends, instead of focusing on diversity, focusing on the goals the company is trying to pursue in terms of product development, market penetration, market share and increasing customer loyalty. Then look at its target markets. Diversity brings a company better insight to other markets. The essence of the purpose of a company is to create and maintain customers. Diversity is one factor directly related to achieving that bottom-line goal.

### Managing conflict

There are already many differences within a workplace environment — differences in age, professional focus, gender and — what many people typically refer to as diversity — in culture. Diversity is more difficult to manage.

"That which brings more power to the team happens to bring more misery to the team" Cruz said. "Diversity brings a great vision, but also brings more difficulty to manage."

Cruz recommends the following when learning to better work together in a multi-cultural work environment:

- **Understand the purpose of the company.** Organizational members need to be trained with proper objectives in mind. A team has a purpose — to create and maintain customers. In order to do that, businesses have to learn certain things about the market they are trying to address, a market, which is very diverse. In order to understand a diverse marketplace organizations must mirror it by employing or calling upon people from diverse backgrounds.



The Beber Silverstein Group ad agency relies upon its diverse staff to reach more markets.

- **Throw away the cookie-cutter approach.** Many executives are not willing to do this and instead take on an attitude of "this is the way I do things." If companies were comprised of only one ethnicity, then this view would be fine, but this is a globalized world.

- **Learn about the differences.** Manage by wandering around and talking to employees. A leader understands the need to personalize management styles based on the individual needs within the team. If the differences in learning, work and communication styles, and how employees best respond to a certain leadership style are neglected, then managers are going to have a problem.

- **Be sensitive to these differences.** By their very nature, teams are diverse. Communication and work styles will inevitably vary among employees, whether due to differences in culture, personality, gender or education level. Different styles aren't bad; they are just different.

- **Focus on effective communication throughout the organization.** Human interaction in the work place succeeds or

fails as a direct result of the ability to communicate ideas and feelings. The communication process affects every activity in an organization. Sales, customer service, delegation, meetings and goal setting are just some of the process influenced by the ability to communicate ideas effectively.

What does a company do to incorporate diversity as part of the corporate culture, as opposed to simply the mission statement? According to leading diversity publication *Diversity, Inc.*, management needs to understand the corporate leadership's mission and be able to implement diversity in the strategic, bottom-line, daily business decisions.

Focus on what objectives the organization would like to reach, such as the cultural corporate values and the governing values within the organization. Then, develop a plan for reaching those goals, recognizing that because it is a culturally diverse work team, people will grow at different paces.

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