

HIRING MULTICULTURAL WORKERS

The United States Office of Employment predicts that 29 percent of the U.S. labor force will be comprised of minorities by 2008. More importantly, it estimates that between 1998 and 2008 some 41 percent of the people entering the U.S. workforce will be minorities. With over 120 million Baby Boomers retiring and only 70 million Generation-X employees to fill their jobs we must obviously look elsewhere to meet this shortfall.

Hiring people from diverse cultures is one possible solution that many companies are turning to but they're finding it very different from hiring European American workers. Issues such as advertising for candidates, interviewing techniques, screening or testing, reviewing resumes and getting referrals to workers must be customized to this group.

The most effective source for minority workers is to ask current employees for referrals. This technique can be very effective among people from diverse cultures as this is the preferred way to find a employer. In countries outside the United States there is much less advertising and referrals are common. Make it a habit to regularly ask workers for referrals. Many companies offer financial incentives for those who refer people who are hired and who stay for a specified period of time ranging from a hundred dollars for laborers to thousands in the high-tech field. Referrals are particularly effective for attracting Asians and Hispanics who are very family-oriented.

While personal referrals are preferred, advertising over the Internet can be very effective for Asians and Asian Indians because they are very technologically-savvy due to the heavy emphasis on computers in their home countries. On the other hand, Hispanics and African Americans tend to prefer a more personal approach and more traditional media such as newspapers and direct mail can be more cost-effective in grabbing their attentions. In fact, Hispanics in the U.S. receive less direct mail than any other group and many actually look forward to receiving it.

Culture can have an impact on how different groups of people write resumes. African Americans are quite used to the prevalent style of resume writing used here but Asians are not. In fact, it is traditional in the Asian culture not to "blow one's own horn" and you may find that some job applicants may understate their qualifications for this reason. While it is common today for "resume inflation" or "experience exaggeration" to take place you may find that it is just the opposite for Asians. Modesty is common practice and to boast about one's experience or qualifications is frowned upon. It's not unusual to read a traditional Asian person's resume only to find a mere chronological list of jobs with very few duties listed and almost no awards earned. Obviously, one must be sensitive to cultural differences when screening resumes today.

Most of us assume that the personal interviewing process is a normal part of the hiring procedure but not all cultures are comfortable with this technique. African Americans and Middle Easterners seem to be very comfortable with interviews as studies show they tend

to prefer verbal communications. On the other hand, Asians are more at ease writing answers to questions rather than verbalizing. They tend to be process thinkers and not very familiar nor at ease with surprise questions that are the hallmark of today's job interviews. Given an opportunity to process, they are often able to come up with very creative answers to complex and difficult problems. Hispanics as a group are often more kinesthetic communicators who are at a disadvantage in verbal interview situations. Using a combination of interview techniques for all candidates can give you a more complete picture of their capabilities. There are numerous diagnostic tools that assess candidates' strengths and weakness using different modes of communication styles.

The most common initial screening of job prospects is often the telephone interview. Again, keep in mind that Asians are often much less verbal than many other cultural groups and this process can not only put people from this culture at a disadvantage but also cause your company to miss an excellent employee as well. Even Asian Americans may not interview well over the telephone due to cultural influences.

If you want to be effective in finding, recruiting and hiring people from diverse cultures locate a human resources expert experienced in employing multicultural workers to help you develop an effective approach.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Michael Lee, MBA, is a diversity consultant who helps companies hire and retain top minority employees. He is the author of several books on the subject of multicultural relationships and he speaks around the world to organizations that want to obtain the benefits of a diverse workforce. Michael can be reached by e-mail at: Michael@EthnoConnect.com or by phone at (800) 41-SPEAK.