



## Teamwork & Diversity

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### SUMMARY

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1. *Question what you see and read—reality may not be what it appears to be.*
2. *Use a statistical-based foundation for assessing the business value of diversity.*
3. *Develop leaders who are diversity-wise and have skills such as listening and involving everyone.*
4. *Straighten out your missteps.*
5. *Used an integrated systems approach to diversity, not a quick fix.*

### **Is diversity alive and well in the US?**

#### **AMERICAN HEROES**

**What was he thinking** when Los Angeles Lakers' Center Shaquille O'Neal remarked on a sports program, "Tell [Houston Rockets'] Yao Ming, 'ching-chong-yang-wah-ah-soh.'" Studio guests at *FoxSports* laughed. Members of the Asian-American community called O'Neal to task for his juvenile humor and raised tough issues.

**Another example ~ what was NASA intending** when they chose the crew of the Columbia space mission? On Saturday, February 1, five American astronauts lost their lives in the space-shuttle Columbia disaster over Nacogdoches, Texas. One could assume this crew was intentionally chosen for the unique combination of each person's knowledge, skills and abilities in addition to their obvious cultural and ethnic differences. Each astronaut brought a valuable history to the mission team: former test pilot, flight surgeon, Navy commander, combat pilot from Israel, engineer of Indian descent, pilot-doctor, master's degree in physics, and another experienced test pilot - a black astronaut who grew up in Spokane, Washington.

## CHALLENGE

To adapt a concept from Susan Scott, author of *Fierce Conversations*, we **must seek the truth about tough issues, like diversity, through the process of “interrogating reality.”** Master the courage to engage in exploration of different viewpoints and avoid laying blame. Scott emphasizes, “Our competitive advantage is to learn from our changing realities and respond quickly. If we entertain multiple realities, we create possibilities that did not exist for us before.”

What are the multiple realities about diversity that we need to learn? What can wise leaders at every organizational level do about diversity so they can create new possibilities for their own companies? How can we avoid turning efforts to enhance diversity into a superficial strategy to improve public image and sales?

## WHAT IS REAL?

- **Was Shaq’s remark just a juvenile attempt at humor?** Was it racist speech or simply an unaware cultural misstep? Eleanor Lee, director of communications at the Organization for Chinese Americans (OCA), a Washington, D.C.-based advocacy group, said OCA has recommended that the NBA have diversity training for league players and coaching staff.
- **Were the astronauts on the unfortunate Columbia mission all essential to its success?** Or, were they chosen for their public relations value to NASA and America’s enormous investment in continued space research? Or, was it a statement about US-Israeli support? The jury is still out on these “tough” questions that are certainly not intended in any way to minimize the astronauts’ contributions and loss.
- **IS diversity alive in America?** Historically defined as cultural, racial, gender and religious variations, in order to capitalize on all human assets and avoid alienating those with “differences,” today we must approach diversity from a much broader perspective. Recognize that maximum participation produces maximum innovation and productivity – both of which are as vital in today’s business world, as in space research.

**We welcome readers’ replies to the “tough” questions about Shaq and the Columbia crew.**

## STATISTICAL REALITIES

**2002 Diversity Trends: What Was Hot? What Has Staying Power?** Excerpts from the Diversity.com article by Yoji Cole.

- Coca-Cola paid \$8 million in back pay to African-American executives because top brass failed to recruit diverse candidates for the company's board of directors. K-Mart filed for bankruptcy partly because it didn't capitalize on multicultural markets. African Americans, Latinos, and women are sadly underrepresented on corporate boards. For example, African Americans hold only 392 board seats out of 7,892 Fortune 1,000 positions, according to the Conference Board study on board diversity in U.S. corporations. And what about gays and lesbians, people with disabilities and older workers?
- "There's a perception among people of color that almost every workplace has its informal quota -- an unwritten number that assures that the presence of black, brown or yellow faces, particularly in executive ranks, never will be large enough to threaten the white-held 'comfort zone.' "

### **WISE LEADERS SEE DIVERSITY AS AN ASSET - a high-stakes numbers game**

- According to staff at [www.Diversity.com](http://www.Diversity.com), "The corporate world is acutely aware of the rapidly evolving U.S. demographics because business leaders increasingly understand that the prevalence of immigrants, people of color and non-traditional families represents an economic opportunity that will dominate their agendas for at least the next decade. Their decision to emphasize diversity is based on the numbers, which paint a clear picture of a country with increasingly lucrative ethnic and multicultural populaces, each with its own set of cultural nuances."
- Wise leaders foster a diversity-friendly environment that sensitizes employees to maximizing input from their customers, each other and their suppliers. "Diversity" is very much alive in America and must be squarely addressed as a business asset rather than something to be feared or even worse, ignored.

## **TIPS FOR WISE DIVERSITY-FRIENDLY LEADERS** **- from other wise leaders**

**1. If you have a cultural misstep**, Mark Pasetky, president and CEO of Mark Allen and Co. (a New York-based strategic marketing company that specializes in helping executives nurture their executive brands) advises the following actions excerpted from the 2003 [DiversityInc.com](#) article by Kipp Cheng.

- **Admit wrongdoing:** Acknowledge insensitivity candidly and quickly, ask for forgiveness and move on. Show, don't tell. Through your actions, demonstrate over the long-term diversity is critical. "If you're an executive, it's time to show that you've instituted policies that benefit minority groups." Pasetky added that Trent Lott's appeal that he supports minorities rang false because there was no track record to show for his proclaimed "commitment." Rinse and repeat: After contrition, "you have to live it," Pasetky said. "You can't apologize, say you're wholly committed to diversity, and then follow up with no action."
- Pasetky said O'Neal's original apology, which echoed Lott's "If I offended anyone..." comment, failed to quell people because it was a qualified one. "That was the wrong thing to say. Giving a qualified apology minimizes the impact of what's being said. [O'Neal] was clearly wrong and it was an inappropriate comment. His best bet was to have a quick apology indicating that he was wrong and move forward from there."

### **2. Lead by consensus - First Black ABA President emphasizes respect.**

Following are excerpts from Linda Bean's article in [DiversityInc.com](#).

- Dennis Archer, is the first African-American president of the American Bar Association (ABA). He is chairman of Dickinson Wright, one of the oldest, largest law firms in Detroit and a former mayor of Detroit. "Leaders may be blessed with unique vision, Archer says, but the key to transforming that vision into a shared reality requires the willingness to create and maintain partnerships, to hold an honest conversation and, finally, to build a consensus." That leadership process includes "understanding of and appreciation for the value that a diverse group brings to the table."
- A culture of respect represents a company's best defense against bias or harassment lawsuits. "If you treat your co-workers the way you would like your sister or your son to be treated, diversity becomes a part of your everyday thinking," Archer says. "It is just common sense and respect."

### 3. Integrate diversity to build partnerships and turn the vision into reality ... says David Bader, CEO & President of David E. Bader Associates, Inc, a consulting firm specializing in diversity awareness education.

- "An integrated systems approach can reach employees at all levels through Employee Involvement (EI) programs," according to Bader. Check out the range of participants on your cross-department teams, committees and your work units. Be sure you have the greatest variety of people actively participating -- not just getting the work done but in making decisions and developing improvements.

- "Three components will lead to success: getting people involved, developing experience-based diversity awareness training, and creating understanding through multi-cultural educational programs," Bader emphasizes. People appreciate interesting, relevant programs presented by knowledgeable people based on their own experiences rather than text-book research. According to Bader, "for example, some of the most successful programs we presented, and later implemented for federal, public and private sector clients included practical workplace techniques on how to obtain long-term organizational results through employee involvement program initiatives."



#### 4. Learning to listen is a key leadership skill, civil-rights lawyer says

Following are excerpts from Linda Bean's 2002 article in *DiversityInc.com*.

- "Never get that comfortable with your own opinion that you shut out someone else's," said Hausfeld, a Washington, D.C. attorney who practices civil rights and antitrust law. "Listen."
- In his 47-member diversified firm, everyone recognizes diversity is critical to the business, Hausfeld says. "In my mind, diversity is putting together the best talent from whatever source is available," he says. "I've always found that, if you are going to advance, you have to have the broadest possible range of interests expressed."
- "Why not get that input," he adds, "if you are in fact making decisions in a global, multiethnic environment?"

#### BIGGEST MYTHS ABOUT DIVERSITY

Separate fact from fiction. Following are selected myths from Eric L. Hinton's, 2002 article in *DiversityInc.com* as well as from an interview with David Bader.

- **Diversity at the lower rungs of a company means diversity at the top.** Wrong. Even if there's a diverse workforce, that doesn't mean diversity exists where decisions are made.
- **The fuzzy math really makes sense.** Wrong. Look at the percentages, actual numbers and turnover rates of people of color in large organizations.
- **The very concept of diversity is outdated.** Wrong assumption if we assume that people move along in their careers solely on ability. "The truth is most people advance because of their access to key assignments and key people in the company. And often these people and assignments are not accessed equally. Typically, people get promoted by people who are comfortable with them and think they are 'members of the club' rather than on just ability."
- **Corporate culture can change overnight.** Wrong. Even when the CEO of a company is truly committed to embracing diversity, it's still a long and arduous road to travel. "One drawback is that many look at diversity as a program rather than a process ... For culture change to happen, tough decisions have to be made and people have to do things radically different from the way they've always done them."
- **"It's not a fast food type of buy,"** says David Bader. "They are long-term programs to create organizational change .... going beyond the podium, and into the heart of the organization to jump start it and to keep it running smoothly. It takes a great deal of time to bring about a

change in organizational behavior and the culture and it doesn't cost that much either. The payoff is in the bottom line -- no question about it."

- **Diversity is a quick fix Band-Aid for a company's travails.** Wrong. Perhaps the greatest misperception revolving around diversity is that diversity training can be applied haphazardly as a quick remedy to the various ills of a corporation, said Mary Frances Winters, president/CEO of The Winters Group, a Rochester, N.Y.-based diversity-consulting firm.
- **You can learn it in one program during one day.** Wrong. Company leadership must be willing to get down in the trenches and incorporate an initiative that has a developmental aspect to it. "It's a tough subject. You can't learn it all in a two-hour or four-hour session. People have thoughts and opinions. We're trying to change mindsets. In order to do that it takes an ongoing type of approach. But for those that think it's a one-day event and done and now we go back to work, it doesn't work. The learning that we advocate has to be institutionalized," Winters said.

### **HOW Diversity Matters CAN HELP YOU embark on a long-term education and change process**

- ✓ The comprehensive Power of ALL approach
- ✓ Your strategic plan including values, policies and procedures
  - ✓ Educational programs from introductory to advanced

**Go to our web site for information: [www.Diversity-Matters.Net](http://www.Diversity-Matters.Net)  
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614.864-5111**

#### **Quick Tips**

1. Capitalize on the unique and innovative contributions of a diverse workforce
2. Use emotionally intelligent communications, appreciative inquiry and "fierce conversations"
3. Adapt your leadership styles to achieve best results from every person
4. Establish and implement civil guidelines to foster respect
5. Build diverse teams that maximize everyone's strengths & successes through consensus building
6. Integrate diversity-friendly policies and practices into every nook and cranny of your organization.