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Our 3,600-person facility in Pennsylvania was pretty much an all-white site, but we were starting to recruit women and minorities. It had been an all-male leadership group and we needed to diversify to reflect the workforce changes. We were not very successful in retaining women and minorities and making the investment in training and development only to lose new managers in the first three to five years was a huge expense. Besides attrition issues, we wanted to have leadership teams work more effectively together to improve productivity. We saw VISIONS training as an opportunity to try something different that might help us leverage differences and grow the business.

1. *Key decision makers have to take ownership.*

If the “diversity work” has a strong business case, then leadership will not only support it, but will actively model it. At our plant, the work definitely changed the behavior of key managers. They listened more carefully to what was said, asked about what was unsaid, and were more receptive to different ways of thinking and different approaches. The culture of the place changed; it actually felt more inclusive. It took a critical mass, but the support of the managers was key to success. I think that if it starts from the ground up, it doesn’t last, because the leaders don’t appreciate, recognize, or reward the people who are doing the work. And we found that you don’t need everyone to engage at the same level. You do, however, need them to support others who are involved and not sabotage the work.

2. *Choose an organization to help you that is credible, effective, and is flexible to your needs.*

Business people look for credentials, both in the leadership of the consulting organization and in the individuals providing the training. Our management team was impressed that most of the VISIONS team had advanced degrees in psychology or a related field.

Plus, in order to be effective and give the work a chance for longevity, we found you need a significant emotional event in the training experience. Participants need “unfinished business” to continue their learning journey. Even in a two-day workshop, the “Wow Factor “ is important: *“Wow, this is really starting to make me understand myself and other people in a way that I never understood before.”* We saw, almost instantly, some bonding on teams that we hadn’t seen before, some recognition of why people behaved the way they did. People shared in ways they never had. One man had inherited from his grandfather the position of Chief of the tribe. He had never told anyone. In the session, he told his story and he was surprised how in awe people were; he thought they would make fun of him. He ended up inviting people to a pow-wow and 30 people attended. We had so many significant personal events from those sessions. The guidelines for the workshops helped make it a safe space.

And finally, you need cost effectiveness and flexibility. A lot of consultants foster dependence; they don’t share their materials and they want to stay with you forever. We felt it would be most cost-effective to work with someone who

would help us take ownership of our process, who would train us to take over the ongoing training and provide support in that effort as needed. We worked closely with VISIONS for two years or more, but by that time, we had trained about 32 people as trainers. Plus, VISIONS didn't just "train the trainers;" we would co-teach, get critiqued, meet with the VISIONS instructors, and really were allowed to process what was going on for us in the sessions. Since we were experiencing more continuity at the plant, it was easier to keep the experience going and deepen it.

3. Document your results.

This is important—to keep the work going you need to see some measurable business results. We statistically determined that we had less attrition due to our efforts and were able to attract a more diverse workforce. For example, over a three or four year period of time, we were able to attract 26 African-Americans and a huge number of women joined the organization...and they stayed with us. We were also able to document other positive business results because teams were able to work better together; there was a 30% productivity improvement that was recorded and attributed to the training, based on people's comments and the timing of the results. This kept both management and plant personnel engaged in wanting to continue with what we had started. Thus, our plant became a more effective operation because of our work to "recognize, understand, appreciate and leverage differences." We made, and continue to make, a business case for the ongoing work...and the work goes on because of it.