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The Network Newsletter, Volume 3 Number 1

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The Network Newsletter

The Workplace Diversity Network: A Project of Cornell University ILR and The National Conference

Volume 3 Number 1 February 1997

Could It? Does It? How Can We Prevent It Here?

Responding to the Texaco Case

The Texaco discrimination case and the publicity that surrounded it compelled many of us to step back and think the unthinkable: Could it happen here? Does it happen here? How can we prevent it from happening here?

Given the nationwide discussion incited by the Texaco case, we were interested to hear the thoughts and responses of Network members. We invited several Network members to consider two questions: How has the Texaco case influenced your organization's diversity efforts? Do you believe the Texaco case reflects the reality of the American workplace or is it an isolated incident? Here's what they said.

Terri Smalley is the Cultural Diversity Specialist with Talbots, a manufacturer and retailer of upscale women's fashions based in Hingham, Massachusetts. Terri acknowledged that while the Texaco case did not produce widespread discussion within the company, any time an organization is caught discriminating, other organizations sit up and take notice.

She and her colleagues at Talbots were compelled to ask "Are we at risk? Is there anything we've overlooked?" Such questioning did not however, create any changes in Talbots' diversity initiatives. She explains that changes in diversity initiatives rarely are instigated by external events, but rather by internal feedback generated through exit interviews and customer evaluations.

Smalley felt the impact most strongly as a Texaco credit card holder who questioned whether she wanted to patronize Texaco gas stations any

longer. "Our company builds its relationship with customers on trust. Our customers see Talbots as a company with integrity. We will always do what's right for our customers. Because our sales associates are often both Talbots employees and Talbots customers, we must show our employees the same respect we show our customers. Talbots is committed to giving its employees the tools they need to communicate that respect to a diverse customer base throughout the country."

Believing that there must be a direct parallel between the way a company treats its employees and its customers, Smalley fears that Texaco may have discriminated against customers in much the same way it has discriminated against its employees. She questions the seriousness of Texaco's diversity efforts and suggests that they could not have been well conceived or executed if discriminatory behaviors were permitted to occur.

Is Texaco a reflection of reality or a blip on the screen? Smalley argues that Texaco is a reflection of some, but not all, workplace environments. She suggests that while the media typically highlight only the failures, not the success stories, they have educated the public about the rights of workers. Consequently, she believes, the work force is more informed, more educated, more outspoken and far less tolerant of discrimination in the workplace. As a result, she anticipates fewer incidents of discrimination in the future. "Effective diversity initiatives cause shifts in the way organizations function. Medical changes that involve belief systems and personal feelings about coworkers. When your own words come back to you, it's an indication that the message is getting through. Then you know you have a diversity initiative going."

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Maurice Cox, Vice President, Corporate Development and Diversity with Pepsi-Cola Company had a slightly different take on the Texaco case.

"It raised visibility and anxiety. Any management team that has no women and no minorities will become suspect. Employees will wonder, 'How can I trust that the management team will be fair with my career if my voice is not represented?'" Cox believes the Texaco case, which he has followed closely for several years, validates our suspicions that such behavior occurs in most organizations. Without the audio tape, he suggests, allegations of such behavior would have been dismissed out of hand. However, Cox questions whether all four executives personally supported the discriminatory comments; he supposes that some individuals simply chose not to challenge their peers. The Texaco case raises complex questions about responsible individuals who choose to remain silent in the face of discrimination rather than risk a conflict.

How has the Texaco case influenced diversity work at Pepsi? Cox says it "renewed focus on auditing processes at Pepsi. How do we look, what do we say? To what extent will this change behavior and performance?" He concurs with Talbots' Terri Smalley when he suggests that "it's rare to see diversity or discrimination occur exclusively with employees and not with customers."

Cox suggests that "there are two kinds of companies: those that 'get it' and are willing to help their employees 'get it' and those companies that are taking the bullets between the eyes. [Texaco reminds us] we can't ignore the avoidance of pain notion -- the implications of what can happen when diversity isn't addressed."

Cox challenges those organizations that are addressing diversity, however, to address a fundamental question: Can we rely on white males alone to manage diversity? Unless diverse individuals are responsible for implementing effective diversity initiatives, there will always be a question of trust. The Texaco case, Cox believes, validates the fears and suspicions of many people that discrimination of this nature is alive and well in the workplace. Although it may not appear in the same context, language or behavior across organizations, blatant discrimination exists. While other companies may not replicate Texaco's remediation strategy (surveillance of in-house diversity initiatives by external consultants) Cox believes that many organizations will be motivated to "avoid the pain" that Texaco has experienced.

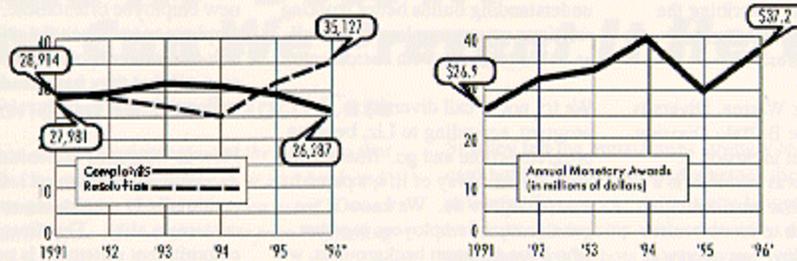
Sheryl McCullough, Manager of Diversity Policies and Planning for the United States Postal Service, was succinct and direct in her assessment. "The Texaco case didn't affect our work. We just kept moving full speed ahead with our diversity initiatives. We can't let the actions of other organizations divert our attention from the goals we've set."

Does this type of discrimination happen in other workplaces? McCullough says yes, it happens everywhere. "Of course discrimination happens every day in the workplace, in many different ways. This is what happens when people outwardly express their humanness, their weaknesses."

We can't let discriminatory behavior derail us, McCullough reminds. "We have to stay focused on the goal of creating a workplace where this will not happen. And that includes checking our own behaviors."

Job Discrimination Complaints

- Fewer complaints being filed
- Monetary rewards and number of annual resolutions on the rise



* Some resolutions are from cases in previous years. Procedures for resolutions were changed, resulting in a temporary jump in 1995 and 1996 in resolutions and in the dismissals of cases.
Note: 1996 is preliminary through the end of the year.

SOURCE: EEOC

Advance Dates Spring Forum

May 28-30, 1997

Meet us in

Louisville, KY!

Welcome

New to the Network

Maurice Cox

Vice President

Corporate Development and Diversity

Pepsi-Cola Company

Sam Javelosa

Manager, Human Resources

Abbot Laboratories,

Ross Products Division

Louis Montgomery

Manager, Compliance and Diversity Programs

Kraft Foods, Inc.

ON-LINE READER'S FORUM

Would you like an opportunity for on-going correspondence with other Network members about issues of substance and importance to your

work? Would you like to receive articles that reflect current scholarship and practice in the field of diversity and inclusion? Now, you can do both? Beginning in April, 1997, you can connect with other Network members through our *On-Line Readers Forum*.

Here's how it works: Periodically, you will receive an article that addresses an important issue in organizational diversity and inclusion work. The Readers Forum will enable you to discuss it on-line, with messages going to everyone at once! By sharing perspectives, experiences and insights, you'll have a unique opportunity to educate and be educated by your colleagues across the country who are working to build inclusive organizations.

The Network Readers Forum functions as an on-line newsgroup, accessible only to Network participants. To be a part of the Forum, here's all you have to do: fax your E-mail address to Susan Woods at Cornell ILR, FAX: 716/852-3802. After you've read the Readers Forum article, E-mail your comments to Susan at: sew13@cornell.edu She will post the mail to everyone's E-mail.

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Network Profiles - Liz Warren

Diversity at Wegman's Food Markets, Inc.

"We are committed to excellence through diversity." is the final message offered the reader on the corporate brochure, describing the services and accomplishments of Wegmans food stores.

We spoke with Liz Warren, Diversity Coordinator for the Buffalo Division, to learn more about inclusion at Wegmans. What was revealed is a consistent thread that runs through Wegmans approach to its customers and to its employees -- *an openness to differences; an emphasis on communication and continuous learning; and the flexibility to problem-solve to meet diverse needs.*

As a case in point, Liz described the solution that was worked out for a Muslim employee who requested time for sunrise prayers during Ramadan. The store was able to provide a conference room for privacy and allowed the employee to schedule breaks during the appropriate prayer times and to adjust the lunch period to sunrise. From the human resources perspective, treating employees equally, does not necessarily

mean treating everyone the same. We try to look for a win-win solution. Childcare and family issues are approached in a similar manner.

Strong emphasis is placed on a continuous diversity education process. Celebrations in the stores, as with Kwanzaa or women's history month, offer an opportunity

to connect employees and customers and to communicate respect for diversity. Greater awareness and understanding builds better working relations among employees as well as better relations with customers.

We try not to call diversity a program, according to Liz, because programs come and go. Instead, we look at it as a way of life, a part of everything we do. We know if we get a group of employees together who have different backgrounds, we get better solutions, more creative ideas. Diversity is a priority now. We're working to make it part of our culture.

The formalized diversity initiative at Wegmans is relatively new. The Buffalo division utilizes a crossfunctional diversity team which includes the division manager, store manager, pharmacy manager, night manager, a meat manager, and representatives from human resources and consumer affairs to plan and review diversity activities.

Training in managing diversity is provided to all managers and diversity awareness is built into new employee orientation.. New employees are given the company's non-harassment policy and asked to sign-off that they have read, understood and agree to abide by it.

How is Wegmans commitment to diversity communicated? Clearly and loudly to employees and customers alike. The diversity commitment statement is posted in departments and break rooms as well as on the sales floor. It was the message printed on plastic shopping bags. Stores maintain a bulletin board devoted to diversity. Each monthly store newsletter contains an article on diversity. Over the past holiday season, commitment to diversity was featured in radio ads and illustrated in TV commercials. Commitment is also communicated through relationships with organizations such as The Urban League and Special Olympics.

As a food market, Wegmans has won national recognition for product quality and service. As an employer, Wegmans was included in Levering and Moskowitz's *100 Best Companies to Work for in America* and recognized by *Working Mother* as one of the best companies for working mothers. Today's priority on diversity seems to add extra meaning to their motto, "Every Day You Get Our Best."

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