

The glass ceiling: recognizing its existence and identifying solutions essay samp...

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Introduction

According to Heneman (2009), “ The ‘ glass ceiling’ is a term used to characterize strong but invisible barriers for women and minorities to promotion in the organization, particularly to the highest level” (p. 293). The glass ceiling has been a topic of debate for years causing organizations and Human Resource (HR) departments around the world to evaluate their recruitment and promotion processes in an effort to eliminate this unseen, yet debilitating divider. Many organizations deny its existence, while others train and strategically plan to embrace diversity. Whether big or small, a company must recognize how promoting the glass ceiling affects their employees, and the organizations growth potential. Preventing the promotion of women and minorities can negative effects on an organization. It is vital that HR departments take the necessary stapes to embrace the recruitment of women and minorities at top management levels in order to keep an edge over competitors, nurture an environment that promotes diversity. Identifying the problem; communication and performance management, HR planning, succession planning and training; and mentoring are key steps that will allow companies to successfully manage through breaking down the glass ceiling barriers.

Women and Minorities

There was a time when men were promoted and given positions of power while women were placed in supportive roles. This was due to the perception that women were unable to handle positions of power, and not adequately qualified. Over time, women have been embraced in the workplace.

According to Heery (1994), “ Minorities and women now represent about 54

percent of the workforce, according to U. S. Census figures, and that percentage will grow each year in the foreseeable future. Employers that allow the glass ceiling to remain in place deprive themselves of the diversity of viewpoints critical to achieving full competitiveness” (p. 17).

The same applies to minorities, as well. In a world where equality is stressed with the formation of groups such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and policies such as Affirmative Action (AA), one would think companies would ensure diversity is at the forefront of their recruiting tactics. However, there are still companies that refuse to evolve and continue to eliminate minorities from low and high level management positions, reserving these spots for White males. Like many women, come minorities facing these barriers may tend to feel as they are not worthy of high level positions, therefore accepting the glass ceiling and continuing the cycle.

A disadvantage of the glass ceiling is that it may foster legal issues within an organization. According to Heneman (2009), “ As with external recruitment, internal recruitment activities can operate in exclusionary ways, resulting in unequal promotion opportunities, rates and results for certain groups of employees, particularly women and minorities. The Affirmative Action Programs regulations specifically address internal recruitment as part of the federal contractor’s AAP.” (p. 291). It would be in an organization’s best interest to work towards.

eliminating the obstacles that may be in place prevent advancement of women and minorities in high level positions. Lack of focus on diversity can have severe legal ramifications. Failing to recruit the best talent is another disadvantage the glass ceiling can have on an organization. “ The absence of individuals from minority groups at the top is a clear signal that a glass ceiling probably exists...This is a real turn-off for top minority candidates because they want to make it to the top, but they know there still are plenty of places where glass ceiling can stop them, So the best and brightest often look elsewhere” (Harris, 1994, p. 5). A high achiever that happens to be a woman and/or minority does not want to get stuck at a company that doesn't embrace growth amongst all employees. “ Companies are losing the advantage of great workers with great experience, great energy...” (Quish, 2006, p. 1). The gap in equality prevents companies from obtaining the best candidates for the job, and lead candidates into the arms of their competitors.

Recognizing the Problem

The first step to embracing changes in the glass ceiling complex is by critically evaluating recruiting practices and identify whether a problem exist within an organization. According to Harris (1994), it is vital for an organization to answer the following key questions to identify whether a glass ceiling exists: “ Will top management become involved”

“ Are hiring and promotion criteria in step?”

“ Has your mentoring shattered the glass ceiling?”

“ What is the true goal of your diversity program”

“ Do hiring criteria promote the desired outcomes?”

“ How successful are you at growing your own talent?”

“ Have you evaluated your recruiting assumptions?”

“ Do minority career paths have a dead-end sign?”

(p. 4)

The answer to these questions can make a “ perfect” organization identify the gaps in its recruiting and promotion practices. It is key that HR ask themselves these questions regularly in order to ensure they are effectively managing the development needs of their employees and developing solutions to ensure opportunities exist so that the glass ceiling doesn't resurface.

HR Planning

Recognizing there is an issue is the first step in knocking down glass ceiling obstacles. According to Heery (1994), it should be HR's objective to “...make sure the organization uses the same hiring criteria for all individuals and reflects the backgrounds of those already in the executive suite. If an organization has only individuals from first tier business schools in senior positions and recruits women and minorities from second tier schools, then it's hiring people who will never ‘ qualify’ for senior positions” (p. 18).

Companies must expand their recruitment strategy to identify candidates that increase chances on moving up the ladder. This includes recruiting candidates not only through hierarchical methods, but by using external methods, as well. A company must look at the skill set and education level of

their senior staff and develop recruitment strategies that attract minorities and women with the same skill set.

The face of the average worker has changed. Women will continue lead in areas of business, politics, education and technology. This will have a direct impact on the once male dominated workforce. This has evolved from the all male workforce from the past. Heneman and Judge (2009) stated, an organization must change their recruitment planning strategies; prohibit harassment within the workplace; provide access to informal networks and diversity training in order eliminate the glass ceiling (p. 294). In order to promote change and the advancement of women and minorities, organizations must embrace women in senior management positions. Organizations must also prepare minorities and women for these roles through development training and leadership programs. Succession Planning and Training

Through succession planning, managers are given an opportunity to complete the training needed to effectively lead and achieve business goals. Companies should include women and minorities in succession planning in order to establish a career path. An advantage of succession planning is that it ensures that there is a steady churn of candidates that have the Knowledge, Skills, Abilities and Other Characteristics (KSAOs) needed to fill gaps within an organization. These candidates should not exclude women and minorities that are full capable of completing the job. Companies should embrace and support women in career development and stress the need for women and minorities to set goals that will lead them to success. This

includes providing training that will further assist in the development of KSAOs and providing substantial evaluations to ensure the employee is reaching their full potential. Performance Management

Monitoring the progress of women and minorities to ensure goals are met, and they are on track to progressing in rank is a vital step in eliminate the glass ceiling. How can an employee know if is they are lacking in a skill required to exceed expectations if communication doesn't exist and there is a lack employer-employee relations? Establishing Performance Management (PM) will provide women and minorities with a clear understanding of expectations, performance evaluations, feedback and coaching, in addition to progress reports and next steps. Companies need to clearly establish goals and objectives. They need to ensure the goals and company objectives are communicated to the workforce effectively. A system for monitoring progress and metrics should be established in order to provide women and minorities with feedback that will assist in furthering their career development. The organization should provide ongoing support through mentoring and tracking PM systems to ensure job placement opportunities for women and minorities.

Mentoring

Heery (2006) noted corporate mentoring as involving “ two crucial elements...team-to-team mentoring replaces one-on-one mentoring. The mentoring program is open to all junior executives who have been identified as having the potential to fill top positions” (p. 17). Mentoring and encourage

formal and informal programs to acknowledge successful senior-level women and minorities as candidates is another step companies can take to eliminate the glass ceiling within organizations.

“ Talent management processes identify high achievers – both men and women – through co-operation between HR and line managers. Mentoring and networking schemes encourage and sustain progress, as well as spread awareness of diversity across the divides of the organization” (Toumi, 2005, p. 12). Providing an avenue for employees to gain additional support by is a great way to embrace diversity and promote employees.

Conclusion

There seems to be countless reasons for the existence of the glass ceiling, including social changes, individual ignorance's and insecurities, and prejudice. It is up to an organization to strive for a workplace that encourages continued personal development without limits, and diversity throughout the ranks of management. Naiman states, “ employees take their cue from their leadership” (2009, p. 49). The steps a company takes in establishing the removal of the glass ceiling within the organization will help them to unlimited success. They must first acknowledge there is a problem and evaluate their current recruitment processes against company objectives and goals. Next they should prepare a strategic plan executing the change. They must establish succession planning and training to identify KSAOs and development needs. Then create a PM in order to effectively manage the effectiveness and progress of each woman and minority

candidate and communicate performance concerns. Lastly, organizations must establish mentoring programs that provide women and minorities with alternative informal or formal outlets to assist in their development.

Accepting these steps will make a world of difference for women and minorities, and an organization as a whole.

Reference

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Naiman, S.. (2009). Generating positive energy in the workplace during hard times. *Employment Relations Today*, 36(1), 49. Retrieved April 1, 2011, from ABI/INFORM Global. DOI: 1711327651. This article focuses on the need for leaders to foster a positive environment for their employees by showing stability during the times of economic trails. Naiman has a B. A. in journalism and M. A. in psychology. She is an expert with 20+ years experience, and her work can be found cited in newspapers. This article is in a scholarly journal and is peer reviewed. The author's discussion and study is presented with objectivity. The article adds great value to my paper, as it goes into discusses the affects of two-way communication between management and

employees during the time of economic downfall and organizational change.
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