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In their guide entitled, “Building and Maintaining a Diverse, High-Quality Workforce: A guide for federal agencies,” (2000) the Office of Personnel Management OPM suggests ways agencies can set a framework for and sustain a diverse and skillful workforce. By providing a supportive work environment that fosters learning and development, and recognizes those who excel, an employer ensures valuable employees stay within the agency. However, there are hurdles in implementing such suggestions. I believe that following these objectives as a baseline for how to begin to build a diverse workforce and that a good strategic human resources manager will find creative ways to get around those hurdles.

The OPM Guide gives three core objectives to maintaining a diverse and high quality workforce. The three elements that the Guide states will maintain employee commitment are a supportive work environment, emphasis on learning and development and an effective rewards and recognition program. A supportive work environment is in place when leaders have diversity training, employees have direction and the tools they need to perform effectively, there is a good work-life balance and a sense of community, and the work environment is safe and accommodating. An emphasis on learning and development means that there are opportunities for employees to gain skills, knowledge and experience they need for career advancement through training, mentoring and developmental programs using various training methods. Lastly, a rewards and recognition system is key to maintaining a diverse and high-quality workforce. Awards to recognize employee’s contributions and rewards such as pay increases or bonuses help to feel acknowledged and appreciated for their efforts.

There can be obstacles to implementing the OPM Guide's three objectives to maintaining a diverse high-quality workforce. The cost of implementing benefits such as training programs, rewards for recognition and employee assistance programs can require a significant portion of the budget in a small organization. Using awards and recognition programs require there to be metrics by which an employee is assessed for such recognition and thus, there needs to be metrics for tracking and monitoring employee's performance. Selecting what metrics are best able to capture an employee's performance is another hurdle.

Employers can overcome the obstacles to maintain a diverse workforce by finding ways to resourcefully use what they can to implement programs. Low-cost options for training and experience may be an opportunity to collaborate with another organization or managers can capitalize on free training programs. Although some costs are necessary, such as creating a safe work environment and providing diversity training as well as providing reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities. Allowing alternative work schedules, family-friendly leave, and mentoring opportunities are other low-cost options to help provide a supportive work environment.

The OPM Guide provides a great framework for building a diverse and skilled workforce, however, the cost to agencies implementing these suggestions can be daunting. A strategic human resources manager can take this framework and mold it to fit any agency and budget.

Works Cited

Office of Personnel Management. (2000, June). Building and Maintaining a Diverse, High-Quality Workforce: A guide for federal agencies.