

Leadership Equals Diversity



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Leadership equals Diversity? Really? Absolutely!

Well, let me give you my personal story and maybe you will agree that leadership good or bad impacts individuals, thus affecting Diversity within an organization.

I am a Hispanic male, born and raised in Brooklyn, NY. Despite being raised by a no-nonsense grandmother, I was *not* the best student in any grade from K-12. I did graduate with a high school diploma, on time, but I was not well prepared for college. A year after graduating high school I entered the United States Coast Guard. Let's say I did a lot of growing up in my first few years while serving. I definitely wasn't the sharpest tool in the shed but for some reason I was very fortunate to have had some great leaders in my corner that took a personal interest in my development. I believe it is an important piece of information to share that all of my bosses throughout the first 11 years of my Coast Guard career were white males.

During my first Yeoman assignment, I was truly blessed with a great Senior Chief Petty Officer. He not only taught me to take pride in my uniform appearance he also challenged me and kept me operating outside of my comfort zone. He ensured I succeeded by putting me in positions of greater responsibility. His leadership prepared me for my next tour in Alaska as an independent duty Yeoman on a cutter.

Aboard the cutter, two officers, one prior enlisted and one a Coast Guard Academy graduate, provided me with some serious mentorship. During that tour, these officers showed me what it meant to be an officer that held others accountable, while also displaying empathy and care. They both took interest in my personal success and both educated me on being an effective and smart Coast Guard leader.

Later on as First Class Petty Officer in Oregon, I worked for a well-grounded Chief Petty Officer that showed me the importance of humility, taking chances and not being afraid to be me. The Chief encouraged me and supported my desire to apply for OCS at a time when I had some self-doubt. Up to this point in my career, some ten years, the guidance and affirmation of trust by my bosses was crucial to my professional development but my Chief helped me work through some of my self-esteem issues.

I went on to apply to OCS, was accepted, later graduated and moved on to serve as an Ensign serving in Nassau, Bahamas, doing drug interdiction work as a command center watch stander. My boss there was a seasoned aviator. I remember standing my first night watch alone and really screwing it up royally. Instead of ripping into me, my commander showed patience and helped me understand what I was doing wrong, allowed me to reevaluate my situation and eventually provided the appropriate course correction. I will never forget that situation, his response, and his leadership approach.

For some reason the Coast Guard thought I would be a good small boat executive officer, so they shipped me and the family to Michigan. Here I worked for my first minority boss. I knew nothing about small boat operations, but he made sure I learned the craft. He took time to educate me on decision-making, mission operations, and most of all, service to our crew. I went from wet behind the ears to a seasoned professional. He made sure each situation was a truly teachable moment. His efforts prepared me both professionally and personally.

As a Lieutenant and Lieutenant Commander at CG Headquarters, I worked for some outstanding captains, commanders, and civilians. All of these individuals saw something in me and ensured I succeeded. Do not get me wrong, I worked hard but I was not always the best officer of the bunch. However, when I had professional and personal crises, they each showed compassion and an undeniable interest in my recovery and forward movement.

Each one of my bosses were not managers, but inspiring leaders. They all put me in a position to succeed somehow or some way. They not only cared for my professional growth, they cared for me as a human being. They affected Coast Guard diversity without even knowing it. I am sure they did not take any more interest in me than any other Coast Guard member, but they showed interest nonetheless.

So, what am I saying? I am saying that your leadership influences diversity whether you agree or not. How often do we hear that people don't leave their jobs, they leave their bosses. It's so true. Not one of these bosses knew I was a poor student, nor did they care that I was a city kid with a funny city accent and probably a chip on his shoulder. They only saw a young kid trying to fit in and do a good job. They only found ways to get the best out of me. When I messed up they did not look immediately to terminate my career. Instead, they helped me understand what I was doing wrong and helped me become a better Coast Guard member and leader. Because of them they kept me wanting to stay in our Coast Guard and continue to serve.

So yes, if you take the time to exhibit outstanding leadership, you too will be contributing to the diversity of our service. Take the time to get to know and understand those that work for you. Take interest in those that don't work for you and mentor them. Create teachable moments every chance you get vice creating pain and agony for others. All of my bosses created teachable moments and I didn't turn out half bad! Thank you all for being a leader and mentor in my life and not a career wrecker!

Leadership Competencies Addressed:

- 1. Taking Care of People**
- 2. Mentoring**
- 3. Influencing Others**