

# Establishing a Diversity/Cultural Competency Advisory Council

## Part 2: Ten Qualities to Seek in Prospective Diversity Council Members

Any Diversity Council intending to make a difference needs to reflect all levels, divisions or units, satellite locations, and functions within an organization so all employees see at least one person on the Council they can identify with. Once the group represents a diagonal slice of the organization, there are ten other characteristics a Council should seek to maintain.

**Credibility** – Council members are not only advocates, critical thinkers and planners; they are also the initial face of diversity in an organization. Their ideas will be given a hearing to the degree that they have credibility based on their organizational track record and relationships. Credibility can come from personal power, from organizational power, or from knowledge, but in the end, credibility is about integrity and the extent to which a person is believable.

**Representing All Viewpoints** – A Diversity Council must be designed to help everyone in the organization if it is to be embraced. If a Council is perceived as existing to help *those* people, it's probably in trouble. Whether an employee is over 60, bilingual, black, gay, techie, or an overwhelmed parent raising young children while holding down a job, it's important for him or her to see someone on the Council who can represent their point of view. The Council also needs at least one or two reluctant cynics. Transforming these members into believers moves initiatives faster and further than almost anything else.

**Controlled Passion** – Managers often say they want people on their Diversity Councils who are passionate about diversity. But passion cuts two ways. It is important to have people who care enough to create positive change, but their passion must be managed effectively to keep from driving others away. Passion managed well is a necessary catalyst; passion unbridled is often destructive and divisive.

**No Ax to Grind** – Council members should be sensitive to all constituencies in the organization, not just the group they most identify with. With a little training and good dialogue, narrowly focused members can be taught to understand that unless all issues are addressed no individual issue can be.

**A Strategic Perspective** – Sometimes people volunteer to be on Diversity Councils to fix a specific problem that affects them or a group to which they belong. But Councils need people who not only focus on operational details but also have a strategic approach and can see the big picture. They need to view the organization as a whole to understand how tinkering with something in one place will affect other areas.

**Introspection and a Desire to Grow** – Every human being has preferences, biases and assumptions. The ability to look inward to recognize and acknowledge one’s biases is a first step toward being a good Council member. An organization should consider whether prospective participants are able to manage their biases, stay open to other points of view and change if needed.

**Working Well with Others** – Because a Council undoubtedly will deal with many contentious issues, the ability to work well with others is the key. Relying on raw positional power is limiting and finite, but good interpersonal skills and positive relationships grease wheels everywhere. Observe interactions and make certain that at least several Council members have the skills needed to work well with others.

**Clout** – When individuals hear that a Diversity Council is being formed, they usually look for participation from someone at the top of the organization as a sign that the Council’s work matters and has legitimacy. Effective Councils have someone in a leadership role as a sponsor and full-time participant. No Council should be formed without that kind of commitment and support.

**Unique Competencies** – Identify the necessary competencies needed on the Council, such as the ability to facilitate, write, speak or serve as a liaison to all parts of the organization. Then bring people onto the Council for their unique and valued strengths.

**Flexibility and Adaptability** – On any Council that has people who have different priorities, values, personalities, beliefs, styles and skills, flexibility and adaptability are not just nice to have; they are essential. Look for individuals with these qualities.

Selecting Council members is an imperfect science. But a representative group that meets these ten criteria is a good place to start.

**Source:**

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