Joseph Santana, LLC

ERG/BRG Leadership Development Series

15 Tips to Consider as You Plan Your ERG/BRG Strategy

By Joe Santana

According to American mythologist, writer and lecturer, Joseph Campbell, *"A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself."* In light of this I believe if you are an ERG/BRG leader, you are a courageous hero! This collection of tips is my gift to you.

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Introduction: Let's Chat About ERGs/BRGs

Welcome to this short collection of articles, where we will focus on topics of interest to those who establish, lead, sponsor and manage ERGs. What we today refer to as ERGs, or as some prefer to call them BRGs (business resource networks), originally started as social activism efforts on the part of employees designed to bring together people with similar social-bounded identities that were underrepresented in the company. (For the sake of simplicity and uniformity, in collected chapter articles we will refer to employee network, including BRGs, as simply ERGs). The goal of these networks was to enable their members to feel and become more included.

During the past few decades, the number and size of these networks has increased while their scope and mission have evolved. Today, the best ERGs appear to be hybrid networks that serve the interests of both members and their organizations. Accompanying this growth and expansion, we've seen an increased interest in benchmarking, innovation and practice approaches for ERGs. The purpose of these articles is to address some of these needs.

First, a little bit about me. During my years as Siemens' diversity officer in the United States, I participated in the expansion of ERGs from 12 local networks into more than 60 local networks and three national networks in seven years. After leaving Siemens in 2012 and launching my own consulting practice, I've continued to lead client efforts to define and grow these groups in a manner that continues to develop their value to people and organizations. I personally believe that these hybrid employee/employer groups will continue to play a growing role in harnessing human and social capital in a manner that will become increasingly significant to both companies and members. For a fuller discussion on my thoughts on the value and importance of ERGs, I invite you to read my Diversity Executive article titled "*A Little Help From My Friends*," published in March of 2011. http://diversity-executive.com/articles/view/1101

In the balance of these articles, we will focus on a number of timely topics for discussion and exploration. I invite you to feel free to write to me at joe@joesantana.com with your own questions.

I'm think you will find these dynamic discussion around what I believe is one of the many important practices arising out of the initial diversification of organizations in the latter part of the 20th century and what I also believe will become the engine for tapping deeper into our collective capabilities in the 21st century.

Enthusiastically yours, Joe.

1. Does Your ERG Have an Executive Figurehead, Sponsor or Coach?

What is the role of employee resource group executive sponsors? I recently read an article in the Jan. 7 edition of Forbes.com titled "Diversity Management Is Outdated and Demands a New Approach." It quoted an anonymous senior executive stating his or her concern about being asked to sponsor an employee resource group that the executive felt was disorganized, time-intensive and at risk for damaging the executive's reputation.

Unfortunately, this was not the first time I heard this position; it always makes me wonder what these prospective executive sponsors believe their role is relative to employee resource groups. Imagine what the board's reaction would be if a senior executive expressed this same sentiment in regard to taking some responsibility for helping a disorganized marketing or sales department. Not good, I can assure you.

Reading this senior executive's comment, one is led to believe that this person feels that the ideal role of the sponsor is to find that special ERG where he or she can participate as an executive figurehead — investing as little time as possible and reigning over a well-oiled machine run by people who don't really need that leadership. That lucky executive figurehead could then be on hand to make a few nice speeches and take bows at special ERG events and just look good. Perhaps he or she could invest a few dollars from time to time toward an event and voilà! — the executive's work is done, plus his or her reputation is enhanced with a minimum of effort. Sounds like a really cushy little job, doesn't it?

Contrary to this approach, some of the best executive sponsors I've met have a tremendous amount of drive when it comes to people development. They are passionate and tireless mentors, coaches and decision supporters who, among other things, help:

- Develop and grow leadership qualities in the ERG chairmen, who are for the most part more junior than they are. They often do this by sitting down with the ERG's formal leaders and holding coaching sessions.
- Counsel and steer the chairmen toward actions that drive business value. In some cases, they do this by connecting ERG leaders to their business contacts or proposing an idea for consideration that will align some of the ERG's activities to organizational business goals.
- Counsel and steer the chairmen toward actions that attract and develop members.

These executives tend to be people developers who serve their companies and ERGs by using their accumulated experience and wisdom to develop the next generation of leadership. At the same time, they also support the alignment of these and other groups in a way that drives greater value to the overall organization and its people.

Perhaps part of the problem is in the use of the label "sponsor," which certainly does not define the role of the people-developers I've outlined above. I think a better term for this group is "ERG executive coach."

Another factor may be the fact that this dedication and effort on the part of these exceptional leaders tends to be a thankless job and thus another thing that spawns a negative attitude in some executives; they don't want too much of their time and energy pulled into supporting time-demanding, needy ERGs that pose little opportunity for personal recognition and reward — despite the opportunity for additional exposure.

For organizations that want to have executives engaged in developing and supporting ERGs, therefore, the effort may be twofold: Change the name of the role to ERG executive coach and work to raise the level of visible and public organizational appreciation, as well as concrete rewards, for those senior executives who do take on the tough role of ERG coach. With these two steps, companies can make progress toward eliminating "empty-suit-figurehead sponsorships" and raising the profile of their ERGs and the overall culture of community leadership development throughout the organization.

2. Preparing an ERG Executive Briefing That Gets Results

Many books and articles have been written about the types of metrics you can use to present the progress and accomplishments of your ERG to your company executives. This post will focus instead on describing a simple formula that ERG leaders can use to package their information for a briefing in a way that will capture and maintain executive interest and support.

During the course of my career in diversity and inclusion, I've seen many ERG presentations fail — despite the fact that the programs had solid accomplishments that were presented using an arsenal of best practice metrics. What was missing in all of these presentations was, quite simply, good packaging. The same information, just more effectively packaged, can have a much greater impact.

Let me give you an example. One ERG leadership team came to me with a 50-page deck of slides that detailed every program that the group had ever had, and ever

planned to have, and was laden with tons of best-practice metrics. They told me this was the material they planned to use in a 20-minute executive briefing that had been scheduled for the following month. The team members were clearly nervous, and with good reason. They had used a similar presentation approach the previous year, heavy on detail and weighted down with metrics. After the meeting with the executive team was over, they felt as though they had rambled and rushed to cram a lot into a little slice of time. It was a nerve-racking experience that they did not want to repeat. Also, the presentation had not brought them any tangible benefits with regards to budget or support for the ERG. Overall, the ERG leaders felt that they had come across as amateurish and lacking in clear focus.

After five one-hour coaching sessions, and much to the ERG leaders' surprise, we whittled down the 50-page PowerPoint monster into just five slides with a concise and highly focused snapshot of their accomplishments, plans and needs that could be presented in 15 minutes. We also constructed a tight feel and flow for the talking points. After a few rehearsals, the team leaders sounded confident and sharp. To no one's surprise, about a week after the briefing, the executive committee approved the requested ERG budget and, instead of the two executives they had asked for as speakers for their future event, they got more than three volunteers. This was the ERG team leaders' first taste of measurable success with the executive team. Although they presented the same accomplishments using the same metrics that they had always used, they had simply spent some time packaging the information a little differently.

So what did this small slide deck look like? Here is a quick overview:

Slide 1 contained the ERG name. It highlighted the network's mission and who the presenters were. An overview of what the team wanted to convey to the executive committee about their past accomplishments, future plans and support needs was communicated through speaking points.

Slide 2 outlined the ERG's accomplishments during the past year. I had asked that the team reduce the details in 30 pages of their original slide deck into a list on a single page. Next, I asked them to highlight — on that same page, in a side box — the performance metrics of two of the programs. We selected the two that really showed what this ERG had accomplished in areas that were similar to key programs they were planning for the next year.

Slide 3 provided an overview of the ERG's plan for the next year. Again, I'd asked them to combine into a one-page list the programs that had been detailed across 15 pages in the original slide deck. Using the same format that we had used for the past year accomplishments, I asked them to select two programs — one that supported the business and another that provided benefits to the ERG members — and to detail these using metrics that projected their expected outcomes.

Slide 4 spelled out in crisp and clear language exactly what the ERG needed from the executive team to execute the plan. Originally, the ERG leaders wanted to say something along the lines of "we would like your support for this plan," but I told them that this was not the time to be coy, shy or vague. Based on this advice, they asked for a specific dollar amount and for two executive members to speak at a future event.

Slide 5 looked like the usual Q&A placeholder, but a lot more work went into the preparation for this segment before the briefing. First, we left a comfortable five minutes (or 25 percent of the presentation time) for the Q&A segment. Also, rather than going into the room in a "wait-and-see mode," I asked the team leaders to brainstorm about the questions they anticipated hearing. We identified about 15 questions, and we then spent some time preparing tight, clear answers. We also discussed some questions that we wanted the executive committee to ask, and I coached the team leaders on how to introduce and answer these questions if no one else raised them. Finally, we identified and prepared answers for questions that we would only address if the listeners raised them. I can't emphasize enough how critical the Q&A segment is to a presentation; unfortunately, many people fail to adequately prepare for it.

The next time you have an opportunity to present to an executive team, remember that a strong list of accomplishments and supporting metrics is good, but a five-hour investment in time to prepare an engaging and powerful presentation can make a huge difference in the outcome of your 20 minutes in the spotlight.

3. Be Specific to Aid ERG Recruiting Impact

We often hear organizations talk about how they want ERGs to help with the company's recruiting effort, but unfortunately, how the ERGs actually do this is very blurry. Beyond saying that they want ERG members to attend recruiting events to be seen, many companies don't have any specific ideas about how ERGs can help — and neither do the ERGs. "We would like to help more with recruiting and outreach, but we really don't know what to do or how," is the comment I often hear from ERG leaders and members. Frankly, in the absence of specificity, it's not surprising.

A good friend of mine who is an expert executive coach once said to me, "If someone tells me they need a job, I have a hard time helping them. If, however, they tell me they need an organizational development senior role in a large multinational based out of the New York City metro area, I can definitely launch them in the right direction and support them. A big key to finding what you want is always specificity." It turns out that

specificity is also the often-ignored best practice when it comes to engaging your ERG membership in your company's recruiting efforts.

A few years ago, I experienced this best practice at work firsthand. Each week, I would get a copy of a spreadsheet that contained a list of open positions across the United States in more than 10 job categories, by states and business units. Often, I would see more than 3,000 open jobs. Despite all this opportunity and thousands of ERG members who expressed readiness and willingness to help, the network members remained uninvolved. So I decided to try a little experiment.

I got together with my colleagues in talent management and asked them to put together a special report that sorted open jobs by region and job category, omitting any information deemed sensitive (e.g., salaries). The report also contained qualifications, experience and educational requirements as well as the name of the recruiter conducting the search and the hiring manager. I then had these reports sent to the leaders of the ERGs, who in turned shared the information with their members. Within the next few weeks, a steady stream of qualified candidates began to trickle in from the ERG members, and steadily increased to a flow. This is the power of specificity at its finest.

If you don't want to just wait for someone to approach your ERG with this type of specificity in your company, take the lead and ask for it.

1. Meet with your recruiting team and find out what reports they use to track their talent searches.
 2. Next, ask the recruiters to create a version of the report that deletes all sensitive information that they do not want to share with people outside their team.
 3. When you get these reports, forward them to your members with a cover note that asks the recipients to supply suitable candidates from their personal and professional networks to the right recruiters.

Make sure you or the recruiting team records the candidates your ERG brings and how many the company hires so you can track your progress. To continue improving your percentage of hires relative to ERG referrals, get feedback on which candidates did well and why they did well. Remember, the best way to improve your recruiting support specificity is to continue to refine it with even more specificity!

4. Build Closer Relationships With Students Through ERGs

 As future workforce demographics in the United States continue to shift, many organizations rightly see big opportunities to increase their short-term general

population and future senior-level diversity through entry-level hires. Some of these companies are also beginning to realize what recent studies have revealed: Using grade point average (GPA) results alone to blindly pick from among possible candidates is probably not be the best way to determine who will be fully engaged and provide outstanding performance in their organizations.

For example, one study in this area noted that its analysis "revealed that student grade point average was generally not a good predictor of early career progress." Another study exploring the impact of grade point average and other criteria on adult achievement noted that the findings of the research "may be somewhat discouraging to those who place a great deal of importance on the predictive value of grades."

In response, a few savvy organizations are aggressively addressing their search for diverse, engaged, promising and high-performing candidates by leveraging their ERG members. Relatively speaking, the results have, in many cases, been high-touch efforts that have come at low-investment price tags. For example, here is a quick look at how easily one company did this:

1. University relations working with the office of diversity prepared a list of targeted schools by geography. They also identified student clubs with members that belonged to various demographics that already existed in these schools. These included the National Society of Black Engineers, the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers and the Society of Women Engineers. (You can also find similar types of clubs for other professionals such as the Association of Latino Professionals in Finance and Accounting, commonly known as ALPFA).

2. Next, university relations and the office of diversity met with ERG leaders to elicit their help in identifying people in their groups close to the target schools who wanted to be mentors for these students and ambassadors for their companies through these clubs. Ideally, they were also alumni of the target school.

3. Once ERG members were identified and mapped to each school and club, the selected group was provided with mentoring training.

4. After this training was completed, the university relations team scheduled and hosted a networking pizza party for the student club members and the ERG representatives assigned to their club at their school so they could meet.

5. ERG members used these pizza "meet-and-greets" to get to know the students better and to approach those they would like to mentor.

6. ERG members maintained these mentoring relationships over the phone, thus building trust, driving value to the schools and the students, and making the students more familiar with internship and job opportunities at their companies.

Leveraging the passions of their ERGs, in this type of high-touch, low-cost program is just the beginning of what smart companies can do to create relationships with their future workforce. If your organization is not leveraging its ERGs in this manner, perhaps you can supply that needed nudge in the right direction.
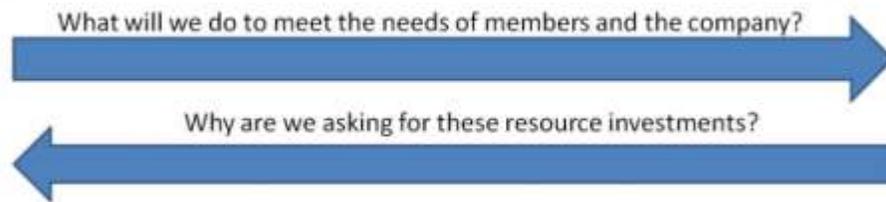
5. Structuring Your ERG for Measurable Impact

One of the first challenges new and sometimes existing employee resource groups (ERGs) face is answering the following question: "How do we collect the information we need to fully convey the value of our employee network?" A few years ago, I developed a tool based on the impact mapping approach to aid me in helping ERGs meet that challenge. Impact maps are a strategic planning tool that help product and service teams align their activities with the company's overall business objectives and help them make better decisions.

The ERG impact map I created is specifically designed to help the founders and leaders of new groups, as well as fully operational networks, collect and present information that links together the needs of all stakeholders through goals, actions and resource needs. Let's walk through this five-column map.

Look at the table in the figure below with five columns and two rows. The top row is a header row with the following titles from left to right: Company, Members, Goals, Actions and Resources. In the second row, you will list the answers to the questions from left to right.

Company	Members	Goals	Actions	Resources
What company needs can the ERG address?	What do members want from the ERG?	What are ERG goals that will meet the needs of the company and the members?	What does the ERG need to do to meet these goals?	What resources does the ERG need in order to be able to take these actions?

What will we do to meet the needs of members and the company? →

← Why are we asking for these resource investments?

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So now, in the second row in the first column to the left of the table titled "Company," list your answer to the question "What are some company objectives or challenges that this network might be able to address?" For example, your answer might include closer university relationships, outreach, on-boarding, branding, generating collateral material, providing the perspectives of a particular target market or talent group, etc. List your response under the column titled "Company."

Moving one column to the right, ask "What do your current and/or prospective members need?" Perhaps they need networking opportunities or an outlet for a particular philanthropic passion, targeted development, etc. Simply list the various parts of your response as bullet points in this column.

After you identify the member needs and the company needs, in the next column to the right, which is titled "Goals," answer the question, "What goals should you set that combine the needs of both stakeholders?"

Moving once more to the right to the column titled "Actions," list your answer to the question, "What actions do we need to take to meet these goals?" The actions you list here might address one or more goals in one or both of the stakeholder categories.

Finally, in the rightmost column titled "Resources," record your responses to the following question: "In terms of people, time and money, what resources does this network need to take these actions?"

The result of answering these question will be a map, which, when read from left to right, draws a line between the needs of the company and members through your goal, action and resource need. Conversely, when read from right to left, it plots a line from your request for resources through what you expect to accomplish with these resources and who benefits from these resources.

6. Focusing ERG Assets on Business Needs

In my last article, I spoke about how to structure ERGs to drive value to both the members and the business. This week, let's look at a few examples of how ERGs can specifically support the business and a few tips on how to get your ERG to start meeting business needs.

To prime your brainstorming pump, here are two examples from Switzerland-based pharmaceutical company Novartis' operations in the U.S. As the U.S. population becomes increasingly diverse and multicultural, an organization such as Novartis has a strong need to understand how its business efforts resonate with multiple audiences. One example of how an ERG can help respond to this type of need can be found in the Network Indian Cultural Exchange (NICE) ERG. NICE has, in essence, helped the sales and marketing groups of Novartis to better shape their patient outreach tactics. NICE has specifically done this by participating in "ride-alongs" with sales representatives to provide insight into the needs of Indian customers and help shape and discuss best practices for engaging this demographic. As a result, sales and marketing groups have improved their customer interactions through a better understanding of cultural norms and the nuances of patients from this demographic.

Another Novartis group called the Russian Culture Club, founded by a member of the company's cardiovascular team who is a Russian-American, recognized a way to approach the Russian demographic group more effectively when it came to the company's cardiovascular portfolio. The network essentially proposed direct-to-consumer TV advertisements in the Russian language, with demographically appropriate actors delivered via specific television channels in the U.S. that were highly frequented by the target population.

Here are two more examples from State Street, a U.S.-based financial services company. One of its needs is to continue expanding its talent sources. To help the company meet this need, its ERGs act as bridges to external organizations that can provide access to talent pools. For example, its Latin-American Professionals network is connected to the Association of Latino Professionals in Finance and Accounting, and its Black Professionals network is connected to the National Association of Black Accountants. Another one of the company's needs was the on-boarding and melding

together of new employees joining the company as a result of a merger or acquisition. ERGs support State Street in meeting this need by acting as welcoming committees and assisting the HR team with on-boarding.

So how can you get your ERG to start driving this type of business value? Here's a simple Venn diagram approach to help you collect ideas so you can spot your opportunities:

1. Create a diagram with two overlapping circles and label the rightmost circle "Business Needs," the leftmost circle "ERG Assets," and the space enclosed within the overlapping circles "Opportunities," like my graphic below.

The ERG/Business Opportunity Venn Diagram

Business Needs   Opportunities   ERG Assets

2. Now, plot in the "Business Needs" circle all the things your company needs. Go deep on this. Talk to a lot of people in HR, communications, branding, philanthropy, etc., and make this as rich and detailed as possible. Go beyond the three or four bullets on corporate slides or annual reports.

3. Next, plot in the "ERG Assets" circle everything you offer. For example, access to specific external networks, language proficiency, cultural experience, etc.

4. Finally, move to the middle intersecting section of the circles labeled "Opportunities" the "Business Needs" and "ERG Assets" that are linkable in a problem-solution format.

This is a simple yet powerful approach that I've used with great success over the years. In a future post, I'll share with you an equally powerful approach for identifying the needs of your members.

7. Engage ERG Members With a Kgotla

In the last chapter, we talked about identifying the needs of your company through my Venn diagram as a first step in developing your ERG strategy impact map. Now let's turn our attention to a powerful approach you can use to fully engage your current and future members in completing this strategy map. This incredibly rich dialogue approach is called a Kgotla (pronounced Xot-la, with the X sounding like a raspy H).

A Kgotla is essentially a public meeting. It's based on a customary court practice used by the people of Botswana to promote a strong, highly inclusive democratic dialogue. Today this brilliant approach is employed by organizations around the world as a way of leveraging the creative abilities of their teams in strategy development and decision-making with support from the Netherlands-based Kgotla Co. (see http://www.kgotla.com). To date the Kgotla Co. has led more than 35 complex leadership and transition programs at multinational corporations and organizations. One of these was with a large copper mine in South Africa where they successfully facilitated a dialogue between 4,000 miners and the executive board of the company. A key component in driving this success within traditional corporate boards is the expert facilitation by Kgotla Co. founder Martijn de Liefde.

While in Austria I had the pleasure of leading a Kgotla with guidance from none other than de Liefde. After decades of using surveys, focus groups and other tools designed to engage people in developing ERGs and other inclusion-related strategies, I immediately realized how the Kgotla is much better suited to promote the kind of engagement that ERG and council leaders want from their members. Unlike surveys where the questions tend to channel the dialogue along a pre-set path of seeking expected answers, a Kgotla provides participants with an opportunity to explore divergent lines of thinking. This rich dialogue, combined with other techniques, draws out people's creativity, making the Kgotla extremely powerful.

The end result of a Kgotla is the full engagement of the participants' wisdom and creativity. In other words, it provides a vehicle for culling together the intellectual, emotional and creative powers of everyone taking part. For ERGs, or any group that is seeking to engage the insights of its members, a Kgotla provides one of the best ways to do it. A Kgotla can include answers to questions such as:

- What are some of the benefits that you as members would like to get out of this network?
- What are some goals for the network that could meet the needs of the company and your needs as members?
- What actions should the network take to achieve these goals?
- What resources will the network need to take the desired actions?

Once these questions are answered through the collective wisdom and creativity of the members, populating the ERG strategy map should be easy. In large organizations, with many ERGs and diversity councils, a broader Kgotla approach can be quickly employed to hear every voice in every network and group across the enterprise. For example, many Kgotlas can be held and their outputs fused together to drive the overall diversity and inclusion strategy with wisdom and creativity from every ERG and business stakeholder.

For ERG and council leaders, a vehicle that enables them to listen to their members is one of the most important tools they can have. As President Woodrow Wilson once said, "The ear of the leader must ring with the voices of the people." I invite you to let your ears ring with the voices, ideas and creative power of your members. As you design and execute your strategies, make the Kgotla an integral part of all your ERG and inclusion-planning tools.

8. Power-up Your ERG's Innovative Capabilities with Diversity of Thought

Over the course of the past couple of years, as cognitive and neural scientific developments have advanced, we've collected an abundance of evidence that confirms something long suspected: That the way we perceive the world around us varies broadly depending on our experiences, language, and beliefs, to name just a couple of key "perception-shaping" factors. Furthermore, we've learned that harnessing a broad range of these differences can result in innovation. Books like James Surowiecki's *The Wisdom of Crowds* and Frans Johansson's *The Medici Effect* are loaded with examples of how creativity leading to innovation blossom at the intersections where different types of knowledge, experiences, and perspectives meet. In light of this finding, it's not surprising that many business leaders in progressive organizations strive to increase the diversity of thought in their enterprises.

Like any other organized group, ERGs can benefit by having "diversity of thought" in their leadership ranks. Some readers may pause here and wonder how we can achieve diversity of thought within employee networks that tend to me homogeneous (e.g., a women's network, or an African American Network, etc.). The fact is that while demographic diversity is one of the elements that can lead to greater diversity of thought due to the different shaping influences of personal experience, group experience, language, orientation, beliefs, and so on, you can have diversity of thought in what may on the surface appear to be a homogeneous group. For example, you may have two African American women who, as a result of personal experiences, differ in their tolerance for risk. One might be a very conservative person that focuses on predictability, control, and slowly measured moves while the other is a risk-taking, fast action-oriented entrepreneur.

Risk-taker, Local Thinker — Conservative, Global Thinker

Innovative Opportunities

Balancing "Diversity of Thought"

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Pure diversity of thought, regardless of the demographic differences that drive it, is the focus of the work of Dr. Martin Hilb and Dr. Nils Jent (who I had the pleasure of meeting in Austria) from the University of St. Gallen in Switzerland. Their basic idea is to have leadership teams consisting of individuals with key qualities and competencies at opposite sides of the spectrum who can drive the agenda in a balanced way. To achieve this type of balance, they developed a tool called the Diversity Optima (for more on the Diversity Optima, please visit http://www.ifpm.unisg.ch/en/Centers/DC/Diversity+Approach.aspx).

Here are a few steps you can take in line with this approach, after you've completed your ERG Strategy Impact Map:

1. First, based on your goals and action plans, ask, "What are the key qualities and competencies that we need in our ERG leadership team?" For example, you may find that you need progressive spokespeople who bring a creative approach well-grounded in local organizational culture. You may also find that you need strong influencers to shape and manage key alliances.

2. Now, looking at this list, ask, "What qualities do we lack that we need to bring into the leadership team?" You may need to engage more than one person, or perhaps just one that possesses all the needed skills and competencies.

3. Finally, ask "What qualities do we need to provide a counterbalancing point of view?" Based on this example, these may include people who are conservative communicators, with more global viewpoints, and who seek to understand and ally with others rather than influence them to support their particular agenda. Again, look to see if these elements are present in individuals already on board, and if not, go out and find them in one or more individuals.

And remember, while valuable, optimizing the diversity of thought in your ERG can create some uncomfortable moments. This lack of comfort, however, is not a bad thing. To paraphrase a statement of President John F. Kennedy, "Too often we… enjoy the comfort of (surrounding ourselves with shared) opinion without the discomfort of (having someone around to counterpoint and stimulate) thought." Diversity of thought may, of course, lead to discomfort because of differences of opinion about how to proceed. In the end, though, if managed effectively, well-balanced diversity of thought will lead to better decisions and superior results for your ERG.

9. Free Your ERG Communication From Red Tape

While I was recently facilitating a panel discussion at the National Affinity Leadership Congress (NALC), one of the audience members asked, "How can I get ERG communication out in a timely basis when my company requires multiple reviews by legal, HR and the diversity council before anything is published?"

Recalling my own days in corporate America and subsequent conversations with hundreds of ERG leaders, I can tell you that this speaker's issue is probably near the top of the list of ERG leadership frustrations. It actually represents a powerful culture clash between the bureaucratic approval processes of large organizations and the more spontaneous, innovative and creative forces of employee networks.

The usual responses from the organization's official representatives, which generally do not satisfy the ERG's desire for more maneuverability, boils down to asking ERG leaders to plan their events 90 or more days in advance — 90 days being an approximate minimum time period to allow for the company's often slow review process. Of course, in a company with many ERGs and a few executive reviewers, the reality is that a 90-day approval process can double to 180 days as legal, HR, diversity councils and others become bogged down with requests for approval.

So, is there a solution?

The answer is yes — and it's a simple five-step approach that I've been using for years and shared with the participants at NALC. Here it is in a nutshell:

1. Identify free or low-cost copyrighted/licensable images that you want to use for your network brochures, handouts, posters, etc. Find as many image options as possible. Also include in this collection any versions of your company logo.

2. Prepare standard boilerplate text for announcing your various programs, awards events, networking events, culture fairs, etc. Simply leave blank spaces for venue and time/date information.

3. Craft a cover note explaining that you would like to create a library of approved images and text that you can use for future programs. Emphasize in your note how this will save the organization's "approvers" time by making it unnecessary for them to review each program announcement throughout the course of the year.

4. Send the selected images and text through your approval process. You may need to follow up with phone calls, emails and more explanations, but it's worth the invested effort to save time and energy later.

5. Save the approved final images and text in a folder for future use. If an image is copyrighted, pay the appropriate fee. You can now mix these approved images with approved text and simply add a date and venue for your future programs and send them out.

Of course, from time to time you may still need to go through the approval process again for a new type of program, but the approach outlined above will significantly cut down on how often you need to go through this arduous procedure. By the way, if you come up with a new program that needs new pictures and text, ask yourself: "Will I be repeating this type of program?" If the answer is yes, perhaps you need to add more options to your template library.

Bureaucracy, while sometimes frustrating with its approval processes and checkpoints, is still a necessary part of coordinating, protecting and managing large organizations. This, of course, always poses a challenge to groups within the company, such as ERGs, that may require more nimbleness to be effective. With a little forethought and by working options through the organizational formal processes in advance, you can loosen the tight bonds of red tape and buy yourself a great deal of flexibility and room to respond quickly — even within the most restrictive bureaucracy.

10. Get the Most Out of Leading an ERG

Daniel was feeling terrible. After four years as the chairman of one of his company's employee networks, otherwise known as an employee resource group (ERG), he was feeling a bit tired and did not see much personal return for his efforts in terms of skill development or career growth. The only saving grace was that he had met many more people in his company, but frankly, that wasn't translating into any added career or personal opportunities. He was also getting pressure from his boss, who felt that this "non-department focused activity was taking away time that could be best spent on his

formal job." Daniel was stuck in what I would call a bad ERG chairman situation. Daniel is real, although his name has been changed.

Being tapped by your company to lead an employee network or volunteering for the role can be extremely rewarding, but the benefits do not accrue automatically without planning and having a strategy and healthy conditions in place. Unfortunately, there really is such a thing as a bad ERG chairman situation. Here are just a few common clues that will let you know when you are in this situation:

1. You are not receiving any leadership training or coaching, but are expected and held accountable for driving strategies, action plans and results clearly beyond the scope of your organizational experience and current competencies.
2. You are essentially the ERG's chief, cook and bottle-washer. In this case, being the chairman means you do all the heavy lifting alone: get the speakers for an event, secure the venue, get the food, invite the attendees, do the fundraising and clean up the conference room after meetings (and you do it all on lunch breaks or after work hours).
3. No one else seems to want the role, especially the most career-minded people in your company, even when they share your passion for the ERG's objectives. They may attend your meetings, but they are not willing to join you in the leadership of the group or to position themselves as your future successors. The message here is clear: You essentially have the job that no one else wants.
4. Your ERG job — and believe me it is a job — is not factored into your performance evaluation. It's not even considered a developmental experience.
5. The worse sign of all: Your manager does not recognize value in your taking on the role. In fact, your immediate manager suggests your ERG participation is interfering with your "real job."

The good news is that you can fix these problems if you are already an ERG chairman, or you can avoid the problems that might arise as a result of taking on the role in the future. Here are a few simple steps you can take:

- Before accepting or continuing in an ERG leadership role, make sure your direct manager fully supports your participation. If you are not sure, set up a meeting and ask. If the answer is no and you proceed, you are doing so at your own personal cost. If you do not want to incur personal costs, you probably need to pass on this role.
- Assuming your manager supports you taking on this role, during your next performance evaluation and planning session, talk about how your role as an ERG leader can be evaluated and included in your performance review. At a minimum, you should be able to identify how the experience will contribute to your development of specific skills such as leadership, project management, organizational, etc.

- Explore and discuss areas where you will need training, coaching or support to fill the role of network leader. Be clear in stating what you need. Perhaps your organization already has in-house resources that can supply needed learning, experiences or coaching. If it doesn't, there are plenty of external options available. Be prepared to present whatever options are suitable in your situation.
- Make sure your coaching is more than a once-a-month discussion with a sponsor that ends with you learning very little, but adding to your list of tasks that need to be completed. Coaching is about your development, not about having work dumped on you. Start your relationship with your coach by identifying the areas you need to target for development to fulfill your network objectives. Track the progress of the coaching by measuring your development in the targeted areas and the results you are producing through the network.
- Don't try to do it all. Build a core team of leaders for specific areas of focus, such as funding, getting speakers, event planning, etc. These core leaders should also make sure they have the general support of their managers, as well as support for development in specific areas. Also, these members of your leadership team should ensure that their developments and accomplishments are also considered in their performance reviews.
- Establish a term limit and make grooming a successor to take on the role when your term ends one of your objectives. Give someone else the opportunity to learn and develop.

Organizations today are increasingly recognizing the value of ERGs. Different from their early days as grassroots, employee-driven efforts, ERGs in most companies are now a basic component of the firm. Leading one of these networks can be an opportunity to contribute to your company in areas where you have a natural passion while at the same time developing valuable new skills and contacts. Getting the most personal career value out of the experience and avoiding possible frustrations, however, does require some thoughtful planning.

11. ERGs Need to Benefit Employees, Not Just the Company

I recently received feedback on a panel session that I moderated. The panel was supposed to give examples of how employee resource groups (ERGs) benefited both the company and the members. Some participants pointed out, however, that the panel seemed to be pulled and centered, as if by an invisible force, on the benefits to the company and members' interests were barely touched. I would, unfortunately, have to agree. In fact, despite my own attempts as a moderator to draw out more on the benefits to members, the comments from the panelists tended to anchor themselves powerfully around how the network was bringing value to the company.

A quick review of the most recent articles on the topic of how ERGs provide benefits shows this same tendency to tout the business value, while remaining silent about value to members. To try to tip the scale back a bit, I thought it would be a good idea to review some of the ways ERGs can provide value to members and to offer a few tips on what to do if you want to increase the value members receive for the time they invest in attending ERG meetings or participating in any capacity in the network.

ERG members, of course, have a perfect right to expect some benefits from the time they invest in attending ERG meetings and events. As implied by the very name, the group exists as a resource for employees. They are, after all, investing their personal time in a company-sponsored group that is not required as part of their employment. These benefits to members can be personal or can take the shape of supporting something they are passionate about. For example, personal benefits can include opportunities to network with senior executives, educational presentations that help them advance their careers and opportunities to explore key job targets across the enterprise. Benefits that take the form of supporting something they are passionate about can be found in ERG targeted community help efforts (e.g., supporting Dress for Success Professional Women's Group, volunteering with Habitat for Humanity, supporting ex-military to enter the private workforce, etc).

In my travels, I often run across people who are frustrated because they feel as if ERGs have recently turned into unpaid, extracurricular work for the company that doesn't provide them as members with any specific benefits. Interestingly enough, I often hear ERG leaders who are trying to build up their membership in these same organizations decry the fact that high-potential, fast-tracking employees and senior people in the network's target group tend not to become members. Perhaps these highly sought membership candidates are looking for a missing value proposition that speaks to their enlightened self-interest. Let me also mention that many of these very same high-potential and senior people do have places where they invest themselves altruistically, but these are generally non-work-related outside groups that address their specific personal passions.

- So what do savvy ERG leaders do to address this? The answer is to make sure they keep a lot of "employee resource" in their groups. For example:
- Speed networking events where members can meet with key executives as a way of facilitating introductions and connections.
- Successful role model presentations where attendees can learn, among other things, success techniques.
- Senior executive speakers who can talk about how to navigate toward various career opportunities.
- Participation in committees and sub-groups that serve the needs of target communities that the members are passionate about.

- Support in finding or becoming mentors to others who the members would like to work with as part of giving back.

Some very clever network leaders, of course, find ways to drive membership value while simultaneously driving business value by targeting goals that fulfills both needs. For example, we sometimes see how a network will bring philanthropic value to a community that the members are passionate about and at the same time create a business opportunity for their company. This is always a good approach when possible. Just remember to tout the value to members as loudly as you do the values to the company. Do not assume that the members and membership candidates are simply going to get it.

The increased business value offered to companies by their ERGs today is certainly a good thing. These business-value-driving efforts, however, should bring value to members as well or be supplemented by other activities that address membership needs. ERGs should also clearly communicate in their literature and presentations the value proposition to their members with the same vigor as they talk about their value to the company. In the end, it is true that without the support of the business you will not have a company-sponsored ERG. On the other hand, without a value proposition that attracts a large, energetic and passionate number of the most talented people as members, it is not going to be much of an ERG for the company to sponsor. We need both. That is how value balance produces a dynamic cycle of increasing value!

12. Presenting ERG Metrics Your Executives Will Believe

Whenever I attend gatherings of ERG leaders as either a speaker or panelist, I always wait for that one question that will, without fail, eventually surface: "What is the best way to show executives evidence of all the great value we are driving and to influence increased support?"

 Behind that question, there seems to be an implied belief that — somewhere out there — we can find the perfect ERG metrics that will have tremendous impact and meaning for all executives. Unfortunately, being able to find the right metric and language for your organization is not as easy as just searching through all the "best practice" websites and magazines and simply copying what the "top-performing award winners" are using. While that might prove to be a good start, it will rarely be the only thing you need to do.

The fact is that the same language and metric that may be considered evidence of top performance by one group of executives in one organization may seem blasé or grossly underperforming to another equally senior group of executives in the same or another

company. This often has nothing to do with the approach or tool you are using. It's simply a result of "eye-of-the-beholder" thinking.

The belief that if we present just the right best practice metric all the smart executives will see it the same way is flawed. It ignores the fact that we (all humans, including executives) filter the majority of the information we hear and we tend to confirm only what we already believe, based on our personal biases — consciously and unconsciously. Sometimes, we are able to absorb something new, but usually this happens when an idea is presented as an extension of, or in relation to, something already familiar to us. As the great American writer Ralph Waldo Emerson stated: "People only see what they are prepared to see."

So, rather than feel frustrated and wonder if your executives are as astute as those at the "award-winning company" touted in a magazine, I recommend that you incorporate some of the techniques that I work into my client presentations into your next executive status report.

To get you started, here are two of the many approaches I've used in the past:

1. In dealing with potentially high resistance, take into account and leverage existing positive biases to counter negative ones, or at least interrupt the automatic negative conclusions. Here's a personal example. Several years ago when I was running a training and organizational development team during an economic downturn, I was asked by the division's top business leader, a tough but very fair senior executive, to perform a return-on-investment analysis of training expenses.

I knew that this particular executive didn't think that training the organization's general employees was the most productive company investment; he was looking for the deepest cost cuts possible. I also knew that this executive was a strong believer in executive coaching. Finally, I knew from my own experience with the topic of bias that if I gave him a bunch of numbers about training results, without any context, he would frame them from the only position he could, his bias, and his "gut" would confirm his existing belief in the poor performance of training investments. The result would be an over-severely cut employee training budget, which I knew would have a negative impact on customer service and employee morale. While some cuts were inevitable, I wanted to avoid gutting a vital part of the organization.

My solution was to assess executive coaching exactly where he had a positive bias, using the same approach as I did in my own training, and present the results side-by-side. The numbers, by the way, showed that a similar correlation existed between coaching and executive performance and training and employee performance. The result was a smaller, more reasonable reduction in training budget, followed by adequate increases in later years as the economy picked up speed. So, one question

you can ask yourself is: "How can I frame my ERG results using familiar context to better convey relevance and impact?"

2. If you don't have the personal credibility with the executive team to influence their opinions, I recommend that you leverage an executive sponsor. Research shows that people tend to believe people who they consider to be like themselves and they tend to be a bit more suspicious of those they consider to be unlike them. Things that can make you like or dislike someone include level, job type, alma mater, etc. The cumulative impact of similarity makes you more credible, while dissimilarities have the opposite effect. If you have an executive sponsor who is a respected "in-group" member of the people in your audience, ask him or her to endorse what you are about to present or take certain tougher topics and present them for you. Leverage the executive's in-group credibility status. (Of course, for this to work your executive sponsor needs to be viewed and accepted as one of the group, which cannot be determined by him or her simply attending the same meetings or having similar title grades as your target executive audience. Choose carefully.)

If the idea of using these techniques seems a bit out of place for your organization, trust me, it's not. You are simply employing the same preparation techniques that company executives use when they are preparing for a meeting with their staff and are looking for the best way to convey their message within their workforce's existing frames of reference. By taking these small but significant extra steps, you will ensure that whatever metrics you choose to present will have great meaning and impact!

13. Pursue Effective Practices, Not Best Practices

Perform a Google search any time of the week on the words "best practices," and you are likely to get north of 300 million hits. Ever since the adoption and propagation of this term by management consultants, it's become one of the most popular buzzwords across public and private sector organizations. Along with the popularity of the term, an army of organizations has emerged, promising to act as hubs where professionals of every type can share their best practices. The world of ERGs is no different.

Unfortunately, taking a practice that people say works in one organization and replicating it in another does not guarantee the same result. In 1995, Jonathan Wareham and Hans Cerrits published a paper titled, "Decontextualizing Competence: Can Best Practices Be Bundled and Sold?" In the paper, they highlight, among other things, why best practices from one organization often fail to produce the same results in the company that is copying them: because the importers either do not understand or replicate all of the explicit and implicit organizational context that made these practices perform they way they did in their native environment.

To get a sense of what Wareham and Cerrits mean, let's use a simple example. Suppose you learn about another company's successful ERG practice of having members take part in speed interviews with senior executives, which result in many of these ERG members being tapped for stretch assignments six to eight months following this encounter. You dutifully copy the practice … and a year later wonder why the same response is not happening in your company.

What you don't know is that in the company where this practice thrived, there was a long history of plucking talent from the middle and the bottom and quickly leveraging it to the best mutual advantage, increasing the diversity of the pool in this company and enhancing an existing behavior. In your company, however, stretch assignments may only be given to people who have paid their dues across many years and are next in line. So perhaps if the senior executives taking part in the sessions remember those encounters, in 10 to 15 years they might bear fruit … but not anytime soon. It's really unlikely.

My advice to clients is to avoid the pursuit of shiny objects known as best practices and instead broaden their search and make it their goal to find effective practices. Effective practices either leverage your company resources or directly address gaps to produce measurable results. Here are three tips to get you started:

1. Hitch your wagon to your stars. Look for ways to leverage your strengths. If you already have a well-developed university relations effort, engage your ERG in making that process more effective in securing and bringing a wider variety of diversity into your organization. If your company has a great "introduction to management" program for entry-level employees, develop an ERG ramp into that program.

2. Find and spread your positive deviances. If there is another ERG in your company that is outperforming the others in meeting goals like the ones you want to achieve, find out how it is doing it and copy its process. Unlike external best practices, this practice appears to already work well within your organizational context. Moreover, if you really want to climb to the top quickly doing this, pick not one but several other ERGs that are performing better than yours in a variety of areas; perhaps one gets better speakers, another has a great management readiness prep process, etc. Again, these ERGs that are working in your context have obviously found a way to better leverage the same resources that are already available to you.

3. Finally, if you do decide to copy an external best practice, make sure you take the root and stock too and not just the pretty flower part. If, in my example of the failure of an organization to get a desired result from a best practice copied from the other company, the ERG leader had the clout or contacts to influence a change in his or her organization's underlying behavior for picking people for stretch assignments, there

might have been success there. The problem is that in many cases ERG leaders and members have neither the ability nor relationships to enact such change. As a result, they copy the pretty flower of the so-called best practice, but not the contextual root and stock that support it. As the metaphor implies, without its root and stock, pretty flowers don't survive — and neither does this best practice.

Copying what others label a best practice may in the short term make your ERG appear to be at the leading edge, but the lack of results will soon prove different. For true longer-term performance leadership, my advice is to focus on what will get you to the results you want.

14. Partnering ERGs With Supplier Diversity Drives Huge Business Value

Years ago, when companies started thinking about how their newly minted employee resource groups could add value to the organization beyond their role as home-and-hearth for the formerly underrepresented, supporting recruiting was the first thing that came to mind. Years later, firms began to recognize the opportunity to further tap into the power of ERGs to support their efforts to understand new clients and penetrate different markets. Today it seems ERGs are leveraging every opportunity to bring value to their firms.

According to Bruce Perkins, my company's senior consultant and subject matter expert in supplier diversity, however, there is one more area where ERGs can drive value to their companies. "Helping supplier diversity efforts increase the amount of spend with formally underrepresented vendors in order to meet or exceed federal, state, municipal, as well as private sector client-driven supplier diversity goals, is another huge ERG opportunity, " said Perkins, the former leader of highly successful national supplier diversity efforts at Siemens and before that Merrill Lynch. I couldn't agree more, which is why I encourage ERGs to partner with supplier diversity program teams.

Briefly, supplier diversity programs are designed to help their company's purchasing department meet some very important conditions for doing business with certain private and public customers with regards to the procurement of goods and services from companies owned and operated by targeted groups. Target groups include women, African-Americans, Hispanics, small businesses, etc. The specific shape these supplier diversity programs take can differ within a specific company, based on their customers' needs, expectations, goals and objectives. For example, some companies may have clients who want them to show a high degree of investment in female-owned enterprises. As a result, these companies may spend a great deal of their purchasing dollars with female-owned companies, and require that their vendors invest a set percentage of what they pay them with these companies. The company can then

demonstrate its total support for female-owned companies by reporting both its direct spending with these organizations, as well as the dollars spent with these companies by their vendor partners.

Companies gain a bottom-line benefit from having competitive supplier diversity programs in several ways. First, they become more attractive to private organizations that see them as not only providers of the products or services they need, but also as a partner in meeting their own customer-driven supplier diversity goals. Secondly, many of these supplier diversity programs qualify companies to do huge amounts of business with federal, state and municipal governments. Finally, and not least among these benefits, procuring goods and services from the companies targeted by these programs tends to positively enhance a company's public image.

According to Perkins, "supplier diversity efforts tend to focus on increasing the percentage of central purchasing dollars, often referred to as controllable spend, while they tend to pay less attention to the opportunities presented by spending that happens outside of that pool." He goes on to explain how these "outside-of-the-central-pool" purchases can represent a substantial untapped opportunity for making supplier diversity programs even more competitive. For example, Perkins points out that the types of products and service purchases that live outside the central pool can include consultants hired by HR, and legal work farmed out to external firms, as well as a host of specialized products used by certain departments. This is where an opportunity exists for ERGs to have a strong bottom-line impact, specifically by partnering with supplier diversity leaders to help reach and leverage untapped pockets of purchasing. For example, ERG members can:

- Provide supplier diversity leaders with feedback on the performance, on-time delivery, quality and service of existing suppliers supporting their departments. This can help the supplier diversity team to identify opportunities that may exist to replace non-performing suppliers with one that is part of their target group and more effective.
- Supplier diversity teams can also share, with ERG leaders and members, the list of vendors they are trying to engage, in order to enlist them in the process of proactively finding opportunities within their respective departments and divisions with non-centralized spending.

In addition to this, ERG members can also attend internal and external trade fairs to assist the supplier diversity team in finding new vendors for the program.

The key to any successful partnership is a better understanding of what each one needs and the other offers. To give you an idea of how to do this, here are some examples of how we drive this. Basically, we facilitate discussions that among other things:

1. Educate ERG members on the goals of supplier diversity programs.
2. Equip ERG members with tools to help them identify spending opportunities within their departments.
3. Educate supplier diversity and purchasing team members on the role ERGs can play and how to engage them.
4. Educate ERG members on how to identify and secure potential vendors from their networks that can be added to the company's list of diverse suppliers.

A well-run supplier diversity program, as noted, can provide a huge business advantage with both public and private sector clients. For example, one of the programs led by Perkins supported a $6 billion revenue stream. Supporting these efforts is just another of the many ways that ERG leaders and members can meet the goals of supporting a target community while bringing serious bottom-line results to their organization. I encourage you to take steps to connect your supplier diversity and ERG programs today!

15. ERG Leaders Add Value by Challenging Business Leaders

In the past 14 articles, I've focused on a number of ways that ERGs can drive value to their members as well as their companies. My suggestions have covered a broad number of topics and provided tips and ideas that are pretty easy to apply. In this article however, I would like to focus on how ERG leaders can be of ultimate value to everyone in their organization, as a voice for the progress of the members they represent and a catalyst for positive change.

ERGs certainly add value to the entire organization when they act as homes and hearths for the underrepresented. They also add value when they join outreach efforts and leverage their members' social networks and perspectives to provide the organization with new avenues of business opportunity. There is one thing that some ERG leaders do, however, that I believe is the highest means of driving value and supporting the company's evolution toward greater diversity and inclusion. It is to become the authentic voice of their members' needs for advancement in numbers, level and engagement. To do this, ERG leaders must speak their minds honestly and respectfully, with the goal of challenging status quo thinking and behaviors that do not create an inclusive and engaging environment for the members they represent. If some of you think of this as a return to the activism roots that started many of these groups back in the '70s, well, it is. It is ultimately a challenge to keep all the good things that have been added to what ERGs and BRGs do, without losing the power of those behaviors that were the seeds of their birth and development.

While we have made progress in diversity and inclusion over the past decades through numerous efforts, including those led by ERGs, let's face it: the results are not earth-

shattering. According to a 2010 study, over a period spanning 10 years starting in 2000, women in America went from earning 79 percent of a man's salary for a comparable job to 81 percent, and from being 40 percent of the management population to 41 percent. Many other countries show the same underwhelming results for women, and the pictures for blacks, Hispanics, Asians and many others are pretty much the same. Should an ERG's only response to these challenges be to hold more Women's Day celebrations, sign more diversity charters, or increase the frequency of what a good friend of mine once called "food, fun and flag celebration days" to show the inclusivity of their company, despite these statistics? I think not.

I believe what's needed is for ERGs to provide the most value-driving gift they can give to their organization and the people in it who truly want to become more diverse, engaging and inclusive — challenge them! Specifically, challenge your organizational business leadership and the stewards of various parts of your talent pipeline (recruiting, development, benefits, etc.). The next time you give a presentation detailing what your ERG has done for its members and the company, add a few of the following questions for your leadership team:

- What are you doing to increase the attraction, development, engagement and inclusion of (add here the social aspect that your ERG represents; for example, LGBT, women, blacks, Hispanics)? Even if you don't have demographic representation numbers, go by what you see. It's your perception and therefore your truth.
- Since leadership behavior shapes perception in an organization, I would like you and your direct reports to attend some of our meetings. Please know that your absence is perceived as a sign that this is not important enough for you. Again, speak your truth.
- Now that we've talked about what we are doing for the company and members, I would like to invite you to share your thoughts with us on how you can help us make this company even more attractive and inclusive for (add here the social aspect that your ERG represents). Make sure to leave a generous amount of time for this discussion, and don't back down from challenging anything that is unspecific and unclear.

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but just a few examples of how you can push and take your leadership and yourself to what some refer to as the ZOUD, or zone of uncomfortable debate. The bottom line is that if you never take conversation to this challenging place, where authentic beliefs find themselves in conflict, and you need to work toward a solution through facts, you are supporting the status quo with all of its current deficits.

If some of you are getting a tight feeling in the pit of your stomach as you read this, it's because this level of authenticity that brings you into the ZOUD with your executive

leadership takes courage and skill. To speak your truth and get others to speak their truth with the intention of working toward real fact-based solutions is important for real progress. Something that may help along the way is to develop your skills in holding respective, but authentic, fact-based discussion with others (a shameless and irresistible plug for one of the things I coach, and my own style).

Organizations are generally a reflection of their leaders. If we want an organization to evolve, its leadership must evolve. To do this, leaders must acquire an authentic understanding of the diversity of thought and opinions within the organization. Without that authenticity, these remain hidden and useless. Leaders must also be challenged to face questions outside their comfort zone. Therefore, I urge you as change agents to give your company the gift of your membership's perspectives and truth! For real progress speak your truth loudly, and frequently take them into the ZOUD!

About the Author and Our ERG/BRG Solutions

Joseph Santana is a well-known management consultant, speaker and coach whose specialties include the development of ERG/BRG leadership strategy and execution skills. Joe's approach as a coach is informed by his broad experience, which includes running a profitable NYC-based, 300-employee business, leading a national training and organizational development team responsible for a 5,000-employee engineering company and building and developing ERG/BRG leaders as a diversity officer. In a parallel career as an author, Joe has written thousands of articles, including feature pieces for Diversity Executive Magazine and Insight into Diversity Magazine; a regular daily e-paper called DI Perspectives; and a regular blog on the Diversity Executive Magazine site, which offers tips to employee network leaders. For more about Joe's corporate and consulting experience visit him on the web at www.joesantana.com. Two of Joe's most popular solutions for ERGs/BRGs are:

ERG Impact Mapping Strategy Development

This is a one to one day-and-a-half program that uses a proprietary tool to support employee network program leaders through the development of strategies that will bring about measureable impact to members and the organization. The deliverable is a completely documented business aligned strategy. (Once network leaders learn how to use this tool, they will be able to employ it again and again to sustain alignment and impact). For more information on this solution contact us as ERGStrategy@joesantana.com

Group Mentoring & Coaching for Employee Network Leaders

Keeping employee network leadership at a peak performance level and fully engaged is becoming increasingly challenging. This is because as the demand for more sophisticated execution is increasing, investments funding remains generally flat. This group mentoring and coaching program addresses these twin challenges by providing employee network leaders with a cost-effective means of developing the specific competencies and execution skills they need in order to meet aggressive goals. For more information on this solution contact us as EmployeeNetworkLeaderSupport@joesantana.com

Join Joe at NALC for a "Burning Issues" Facilitated Discussion

Topic: How to Leverage ERGs to Drive Change/Inclusion in an Organization

Hosted by DBP / National Affinity Leadership Congress (NALC)

Date and Time: Wed, June 18th 2014, 9:45 AM to 11:00 AM

Location: New York Academy of Medicine, 1216 5th Avenue, New York, New York

Program Overview

In this 75-minute forum, we will focus on exploring how institutional inclusion is driven in an organization and what employee networks can do to drive up this increasingly important business environment quality. Participants will be coached and facilitated through powerful discussion tools designed to promote creative thinking, not just a rehash of the same tired old approaches.

Benefits

- You will walk out with new ideas that you can put to use in your organization
- You will have the opportunity to tap into the collective creativity of your colleagues
- You will take part in taking the lead in creating approaches that will may well become future best practices
- Best of all, you will have fun in the process

What do you need to do?

Go to the NALC registration page at http://www.diversitybestpractices.com/event/nalcNY2014 and sign up for the event. R*emember to pick D, the Burning Issues Forum for Round one, Wednesday 6/18/2014 at 11 AM*