

Diversity Requires Responsibility and Corporate Culture Change

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As chairman and CEO of Chrysler LLC, one of my responsibilities is overseeing capital investment – investment in bricks and mortar, and investment in people. A successful enterprise needs to invest in both. Over time, physical assets will depreciate; but human capital – like a diamond – appreciates over time.

This is why I am a steadfast supporter of diversity. To succeed in today's multi-cultural, global environment, we must maximize all of our talent. Embracing diversity is central to our goal to attract, motivate and retain the highest performing workforce in our industry. We will never realize our full potential unless we allow the best talent – from any background – to rise to the top.

When I joined Chrysler in August of 2007, I found a company that already had a strong commitment to diversity among its employees, supply base, dealer network and in the way it markets its products. This emphasis on diversity at all levels of the company has been recognized by national publications such as DiversityInc, which named us to its “Top 50” list; by Hispanic Magazine, which recognized Chrysler with a “Corporate 100” award; and by Working Mother, which recognized us as one of its “100 Best Companies.” Many of our employees are also receiving national recognition, as they have been featured as ‘Technology All Stars’ at the 12th annual Women of Color Technology Awards, and as ‘Top Diversity Advocates’ by Diversitybusiness.com.

We're proud of these accolades that help validate our efforts – but at the same time, we recognize that more work needs to be done. We need to not only diversify the work force, but also transform our company's culture. While you can buy technology, you can't buy culture. Diversity will play a crucial role in changing our company's mindset to be more inclusive and more global.

This transformation is a business imperative for a company like ours that needs to go where the customer base is headed. Clearly, automotive customers in the United States are becoming more diverse. As a company, we also need to expand in international markets, where most of future automotive sales growth will take place. To grow our global business, we must be able to operate with mindset of inclusion and cultural acceptance that allows us to connect with customers and build relationships.



In recognition of this corporate goal, we recently reconfigured our Diversity Council – it is now the Global Diversity Council. Our goal is to ensure that our diversity initiative is aligned with our business strategy around the world. As employees move around the world, they will be expected to carry our corporate attitude of respect and inclusion.

I have taken on the job of executive sponsor of the Global Diversity Council to underline the importance of diversity to our company's future. When I go into a meeting with company leaders and ask, “Who is responsible for diversity?”, I want all hands to go up – because diversity is the responsibility of the entire organization, not just HR or the Global Diversity Office.

The auto industry, like other parts of the U.S. economy, currently faces some tough economic challenges. Some might say it is a time to put diversity on the back burner until our economy gets back on track. But I firmly believe diversity is a tool that will help us get to where we need to be – and we need to continue to hold ourselves accountable to achieve diversity. ■