

## **How to Get Line Management to Own the Supplier Diversity Process**

### **By Gayla Hodges**

The recent Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) Conference was very informative for me on a number of levels. While attending the conference, I spoke with several supplier diversity representatives from a number of organizations. These conversations all seemed to have the same theme – how to get line management on board to help support supplier diversity goals. These are corporate goals, and many leaders look at them as necessary evils, as distractions, as things that may not even be practical for their specific area. So, how do we get these people on board and get them to help support these corporate initiatives?

I want to use my change models here because we are talking about creating a change in attitude, in process, in procedure, and in some habits that might be long-established. Meeting supplier diversity goals often requires HR and procurement personnel – sometimes in satellite locations – to adopt the goal, own the goal, and get people behind the goal. If you have a corporate goal – in this case it's the matter of meeting the supplier diversity numbers for each specific area -- that's the outcome. Part of the idea is to get people involved in seeing what the benefit is. *And when I say get people involved, that means that you – the supplier diversity person – have to engage the leaders that you are trying to motivate to help reach those goals.*

Now, I know you might be saying to yourselves right now, wait, it's a corporate initiative and goal, so all I have to do is give them the numbers and they're supposed to rise to the occasion because that's their job. While this is true, it's not necessarily the best way to get things done in an organization.

**The first step in getting line management to own the process is to be clear about what is the organization's vision and how does that translate to the specific activities and culture of each division, each plant, each satellite site, etc.** You can help the leaders and line managers understand how achieving these goals will help them achieve the production, sales or other goals laid out in their strategic plan. And you can help them see how it can be done by pointing to examples.

The most effective way to do this is to build relationships with the people you need to have take ownership of the goals. Just as you, as the supplier diversity person, built relationships with Minority- and Women-owned businesses, *you can use the same process with those in your organization who can hire them, you can also build a relationship with the leader in those areas that you represent to understand what their challenges are and what their motivations are and how the supplier diversity goals fit into their overall strategic plan.*

**The second step is involvement.** So, how do you get those leaders involved? Many of the organizations I'm familiar with have a supplier diversity representative at the corporate level, and then at different site levels they have procurement managers. Most of

Copyright © 2008 by Gayla Hodges

Change Agents, Inc.

8605 West Northern Avenue, Glendale, AZ 85305

[gayla@changeagentsinc.com](mailto:gayla@changeagentsinc.com)

<http://www.changeagentsinc.com>

623-362-3876

the interaction about supplier diversity numbers happens among these people. However, at the end of the year it is the manager at the facility who is impacted by whether those goals are met or not. *So it is of critical importance that you as a supplier diversity representative facilitate* (and, by the way, the root of the word facilitate is *facilis*, which in Latin means “to make easy.” – and that is your job in this process – to make it easy) *the involvement of the leader and the line managers.*

Getting them involved is the task. And most of us start off with the idea that we need to do a briefing. We come in and we give them our presentation, and it’s slick, and it’s wonderful, and they’re distracted by the production issues they are facing that day. They are kind and considerate and polite, but we walk away feeling like we haven’t really made an impact. We often leave the briefing feeling that we have not succeeded in getting anyone involved in the initiative.

My suggestion is that you ask that the procurement manager arrange for a meeting with the plant manager or the division leader. When you come to that meeting, use the time well. Ask the right questions:

- How do you see these goals being met by your organization this year?
- How can I help you to reach those goals?
- What one or two things do you need to make this initiative successful in your organization this year?

Do a little research yourself and think about what kind of recommendations you can make so that you are involved from a support standpoint, but more importantly, the leaders are involved in the process of making decisions about how to support the initiative. For example, a site you are working with might have a procurement manager and you might be able to team up with him or her to do a supplier fair, to do an education session on how you do business with a minority supplier, to do some things to reach out in the community and also help the company reach their community service/involvement goals.

Find out when they do their strategic planning process and see if you can connect with those people who are involved in that so they can make sure those goals are reflected in that particular strategic plan.

When you are able to build a relationship with the leaders, who need to own the supplier diversity goals and processes, you will be in a better position to help those leaders translate the goal to make it support the production or sales or other strategic goals of the division or the plant.

With involvement comes **buy-in**. Now I’m not suggesting that line management doesn’t buy in to corporate goals. What I’m suggesting is that line managers have a specific area that they are leading, and they are focused on the goals of, say, production or sales. So you can make it easy for them. You can do some translating and help them do some translating into how this supports my goals of x number of dollars in sales, or of this

Copyright © 2008 by Gayla Hodges

Change Agents, Inc.

8605 West Northern Avenue, Glendale, AZ 85305

[gayla@changeagentsinc.com](mailto:gayla@changeagentsinc.com)

<http://www.changeagentsinc.com>

623-362-3876

much production. And that will require some homework on your part to be ready for those types of discussions. When you are fully engaged in the discussion and the needs and issues of the specific group and their challenges in meeting strategic goals, you will be better positioned to elicit their engagement in the process.

**Since involvement creates buy-in**, instead of asking a leader, “What level of involvement do you *want* to have?” Ask, “What level of involvement are you *willing* to have?” Knowing how far the line manager is willing to go to support the initiative allows you to see where you need to go and what you need to do to provide the assistance and support that manager needs to be successful. It might be that you can arrange to have a time scheduled to sit down with that person once a quarter to go over where they are with their goals and how you can help move the initiative forward. Depending on how your company is structured, talk about how you can facilitate some things for them to help them reach their production or sales or other strategic goals.

Ownership and buy-in really does belong to line management. What I heard from a lot of supplier diversity folks is that line managers who own the supplier diversity goals are very, very effective. The challenge for supplier diversity representatives is that there seem to be various degrees of ownership of these goals at the line management level. One reason for this might be because we have given them the perception that supplier diversity owns the goals. As long as this is the way the initiative is presented, line managers will not accept ownership of the goals. And until line managers own the goals, supplier diversity representatives are people who come in with numbers they want us to achieve *in addition to our primary goals*. Demonstrating to them that achieving supplier diversity goals can help them achieve primary goals will encourage ownership by line managers. Demonstrating how a relationship with you can help them achieve their goals will encourage active participation in the process.

You know you have ownership when the leader is coming to you and saying to you,  
“How can I do this?”  
“How can you help me do this?”  
“What do I need to do?”

Then it’s up to you to have done your homework and done your research about what other companies are doing, and what other plants are doing that are benchmark kinds of examples. Think about how it would help your leaders if you bring these things forward.

**Then ownership transfers and creates the energy in that organization to create the momentum to reach that strategic goal.** When you are able to make it easy for line management to own the goals, perhaps by helping them see how you can work together for success, you solidify your position as a support person and with the successful achievement of goals, and you become a sort of hero. At the very least, your involvement will help to generate the energy required to achieve the goals and accelerate the processes.

Copyright © 2008 by Gayla Hodges

Change Agents, Inc.

8605 West Northern Avenue, Glendale, AZ 85305

[gayla@changeagentsinc.com](mailto:gayla@changeagentsinc.com)

<http://www.changeagentsinc.com>

623-362-3876