

# CULTURE OF RESPECT

## RECRUITING A DIVERSE WORKFORCE IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

By Robert W. Sanders – Attorney, Husch Blackwell

**I**n the wake of the #MeToo movement and the recent racial justice protests following the killing of George Floyd, many companies are looking at their own efforts to promote a diverse and welcoming workforce. In the construction industry, a focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion offers construction companies an opportunity to develop a competitive edge. This is because diversity within the industry has lagged behind other industries for quite some time.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the composition of the construction workforce in 2019 was 30.4% Hispanic or Latino, 6.4% Black or African American, 1.9% Asian and 88.1% white. Men outnumber women by a

ratio of 9 to 1. These numbers are nearly unchanged from 2015 statistics. These numbers reveal a tremendous opportunity to tap into new,

diverse talent pools for companies that are struggling to find talent in a tight labor market.

Companies will benefit from such effort.

Research has shown that companies that promote a diverse and inclusive workforce have an easier time attracting and retaining talent, perform better, and capture new markets as diverse companies are more willing to engage them.

- 67% of job seekers consider workplace diversity an important factor when considering employment opportunities
- More than 50% of current employees want their workplace to do more to increase diversity
- Racially and ethnically diverse companies are 35% more likely to perform better
- Diverse management boosts revenue by 19% and diverse companies enjoy 2.3 times higher cash flow per employee
- A study by the Peterson Institute for International Economics showed that companies with females in executive-level positions had a 15% increase in profitability

Companies looking to improve their own diversity should first consider where and how they are recruiting. Recruitment efforts should extend to diverse neighborhoods, publications, career fairs, and schools. Job postings should be reviewed to ensure that any inadvertent, gender or racially-biased terms are redrafted so as to not limit the reach of the posting. Of course, a company also can-



## COMPANIES LOOKING TO IMPROVE THEIR OWN DIVERSITY SHOULD FIRST CONSIDER WHERE AND HOW THEY ARE RECRUITING.

employment opportunity. This includes ensuring that similar core information is elicited from every candidate, by asking appropriate questions that:

- Relate to the requirements of a job
- Elicit information regarding the qualifications sought

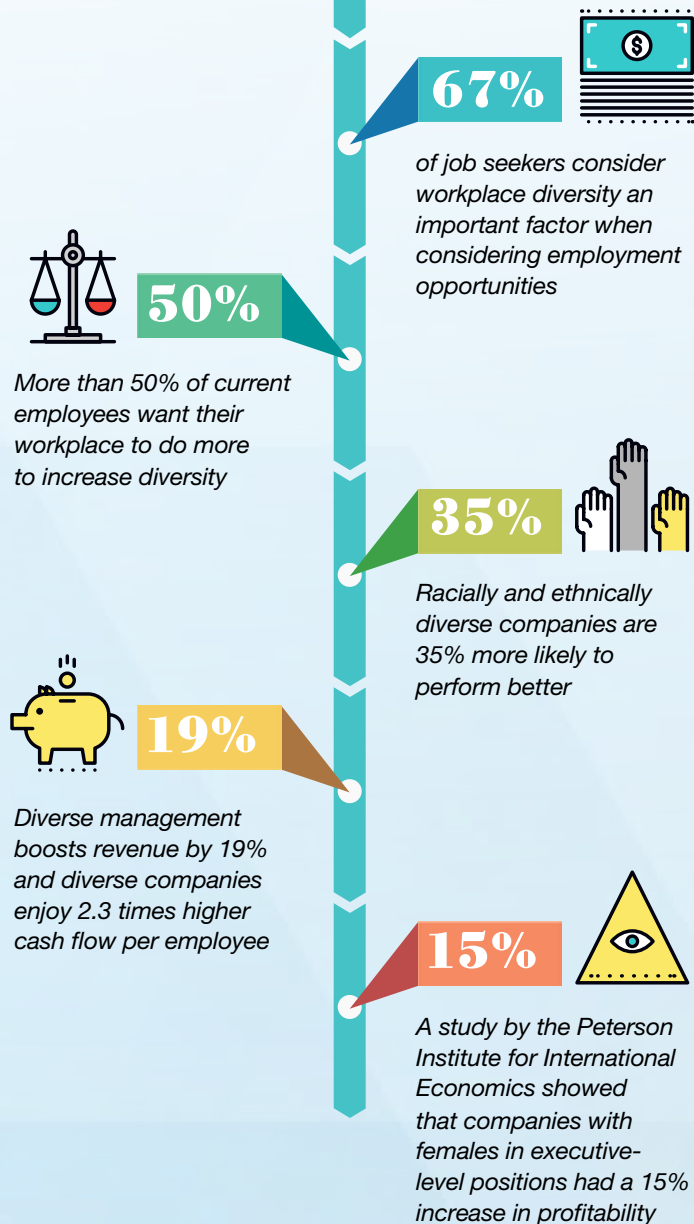
- Obtain information regarding prior experience and education

Interviewers should have a plan for how to handle uninvited information regarding protected characteristics and avoid asking questions that may invite such information. Questions to avoid asking include:

- Are you married?
- Are you single?
- What are your childcare arrangements?
- Do you have kids / do you plan to have kids?
- Are you affiliated with a church?
- Will you need time off for religious holidays?
- What is your native language?
- Will you require time off for military obligations?

Finally, the best way to improve diversity, is to promote a diverse and welcoming workforce from within. Word travels fast, so companies should ensure that the message that is being shared by current employees to prospective employees is that the company is great place to work and one where everyone feels welcome. From a legal perspective, this is done by:

- Implementing policies and procedures that encourage respect and prohibit harassment of any kind;
- Instituting regular culture of respect training to emphasize the company's expectations on conduct affecting the workplace;
- Empowering anyone who experiences or observes inappropriate behavior to address it;
- Investigating any and all complaints; and
- Consistently enforcing all policies and procedures. ABC Wisconsin



not overlook the importance of social media in its recruitment efforts. Social media is often the first place a candidate looks to find out more information about a company. So it is critically important to feature a company's existing diversity on their website and social media pages, promoting the inclusive nature of their workforce.

When interviewing diverse candidates, companies should be mindful that looking for a "culture fit" can lead to searching for candidates that resemble themselves. Instead, interviewers should be trained on recognizing and avoiding unconscious bias and on how to ensure everyone is provided an equal