

# Milwaukee leaders say mentorship, inclusivity, location will grow diversity in workforce

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Milwaukee leaders in diversifying employment said mentorship, inclusivity and location will grow the pipeline of diverse, talented employees in the region.

Dr. Vicki Martin, president of the Milwaukee Area Technical College, told a Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce webinar that internal training and shepherding individuals to assume greater roles within an organization is key to recruiting and retaining diverse talent in the workforce.

“Support and mentoring... is just absolutely critical as we move forward,” she said. “But I think really looking at hiring and our systems of hiring and retention and what do those look like and making sure that we have anti-racist systems in place.”

She noted that at MATC, when talented students are identified, they are trained, supported and mentored to come back as future teachers.

Martin said employers can do this with students coming up through the K-12 system or even in their own workforce if they see talented individuals: “bringing them in, hiring them, mentoring them, I think that’s what really needs to happen.”

Sarah Dollhausen-Clark, executive director of i.c.stars admitted it’s hard to point to just one thing that could benefit the city’s workforce diversity. After all, the

statistics alone need to change, she said, from Milwaukee being one of the worst places to raise Black children to the high unemployment among African Americans.

“We really need to look at when you’re bringing a diverse workforce in, now that they’re in your companies, how do you make sure that they feel belonging and how are you making sure that you are addressing systemic and institutional racism and oppression?” she offered. “Especially within the workforce to be able to invest in those employees, to make sure that your retention rate stays high.”

Dollhausen-Clark noted it’s not enough for companies to just hire diverse individuals, but look at the way its developing leaders.

“I think Twitter users said it best: If it smells and walks like a PR stunt, it usually is,” she said referring to consumer anger from companies using diversity in their marketing after protests started over police brutality and the death of George Floyd.

She recommends looking at executive leadership and building a pipeline from entry level to executive leadership to promote and invest in diverse talent within the company.

“Location,” was Oscar Tovar’s short answer. Tovar is the vice chair of the Hispanic Professionals of Greater Milwaukee and staff assistant to Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett.

“Corporations need to come where the workers are,” he said. “We need more corporations here in the city closer to where the workforce is.”

Tovar noted that companies “way out there” in the suburbs require the workforce to travel “too far” where there may not be regional transit or opportunities for people to get to those jobs.

He also addressed a salary gap in the diverse population.

“They tend to be a lower wage community unfortunately, and I think those wages obviously need to go up,” he said. “Those are the types of items that I think will expand the opportunities within all of our communities, it’s just for the greater good of the Milwaukee region.”

*-By Stephanie Hoff*

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