THE ORGANIZATIONAL FIXER, LLC
TRANSFORMING ORGANIZATIONS

"For Diversity Gains to Survive, Diversity Must Die"

Part I

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It's not the "anti-woke" diversity naysayers or resistors that are the existential threat to the plight of diversity initiatives. Unfortunately, it is the antediluvian models of diversity to which we, diversity practitioners and organizational leaders, cling as if these initiatives are the immotile guns that a famous actor proudly touted, in commercials, as having to be removed from his cold, dead hands.

So, I am not going to lob *ad hominem*-based attacks at the naysayers, because to do so would be comparable to the Trojans blaming the Greeks for the Trojans opening the gates of Troy and allowing their enemy entrance while they unknowingly hid inside the Trojan Horse. We, diversity practitioners, ceded access to the resistors, giving them admittance to the metaphoric camp by not knowing when to say when. We should have assessed that the erosion of diversity, in its myriad forms, was forthcoming. Such a conclusion need not have been reached based on the prescient ability of a soothsayer, since the evidence clearly emerges if one applies the keen intellectual assessment of *a posteriori* evidence, and if one seeks knowledge through the exegetical lens of an unbiased truth teller.

But we failed. And instead of leading the charge of organizational transformation and readiness through the effectuation of inclusive systems and processes, some of us were too busy doing stupid stuff, effectuating actions that retroactively we can now characterize as not only ineffective, but also counterproductive. I'm referring to such actions as boisterously leading the charge to silence a conservative (instead, we should welcome any opportunity to engage in intellectual disputation); or relying on visual representation and scant presence at the leadership table as evidence that BIPOC employees and women have overcome organizational barriers; or sadly, being derailed by kingdom building

instead of working ourselves out of a job. As diversity practitioners, we are tasked with embedding and inculcating the principles of inclusion into organizational systems and processes, ultimately in the organizational culture writ large, from top to bottom. Our primary responsibility is the propagation of an independent, self-perpetuating organizational *modus vivendi*, not one that depends on our long-term existence as overseers.

Diversity Practitioners and organizational leaders must take the mirror test and face a truism: We built the box in which diversity resides. **WE BUILT IT.** Now, we are reaping the woes of box building because here's what we have discovered: When we build boxes, we must live in them ourselves and be subjected to the direct or residual effects from their existence. In one of the organizations in which I was employed, a departmental mantra was "We build the boxes in which others live." Following a briefing in which the aphorism was introduced, I asked the departmental leader a question: "Why would anyone want to build a box for others?" Try thriving in that box. Its corners connote a finiteness that clearly isn't consistent with knowledge development and continuous learning. In other words, box building is anathema to organizational excellence.

We, diversity practitioners and organizational leaders, built the box in which diversity currently resides. And we must lead the charge to eviscerate its existence.

If you believe that there is no evidence to support my empirical rendering, then please respond to the following question:

> Why have we implemented diversity initiatives that employ the negative use of labeling? Think about the full interpretation and broad impact of such quotidian terminology as "diversity hires," "diversity recruiters," "diversity targets," etc.?

When we use the foregoing terms, in effect, we are "labeling," and the impact is not positive. It is the start of a concatenation of events that lead to "diversity hires" being viewed synonymously as "less than," which enhances stereotypes. This perspective also functions as an impediment to the career trajectory of the individuals who were employed under the seemingly harmless rubric of "diversity hire."

Years ago, when the preponderance of new hires were white men, organizational recruiters were **not** referred to as "majority or white male recruiters." Their position titles were simple: Recruiters. So, how do we rationalize and why do we accept the type of specious signaling that occurs with our having embedded the terms "diversity hires" or "diversity recruiters" so profoundly and inextricably in our organizational vernacular?

Almost 25 years ago, during my employment as a Director of Diversity, the agency head for whom I worked asked that I ferret out why his recruiters were not making significant gains in hiring diverse employees in the agency's dominant occupational series. Out of an attempt to afford anonymity, I will modify some of the details, and I also will refer to the positions that were the nucleus of the organization as "widget makers." The recruiters were not personnel specialists; they were widget makers who functioned as recruiters on a part-time basis. The widget makers/recruiters were a racially mixed group of employees, perhaps 90% white and 10% Black; and the preponderance, 99%, were male. They were young, impressive, capable, competent, and competitive.

The agency in which I was employed had thousands of employees, and they were dispersed in states throughout the United States. So, the possibility loomed large that most employees only knew those individuals with whom they had direct opportunity to work.

The widget makers/recruiters were working at or hosting an agency recruiting booth in a "diversity targeted area." Notably, it was not the geographical part of the Country in which the widget makers were employed or lived. A Black female approached three of the recruiters who were working at the recruitment booth; her hair was in braids. I'll refer to her as "Cherrie." After engaging with the widget makers/recruiters, Cherrie reported to me that instead of trying to recruit her, they had attempted to talk her out of her expressed interest in gaining employment with the agency. What the widget makers/recruiters did not know is that Cherrie already was employed with the agency. In fact, she occupied a higher-level position than the majority of the widget makers.

Following Cherrie's revelation, coupled with the agency head's request, I sought to gain an understanding of what transpired in the recruitment exercise with Cherrie. I also wanted to obtain a firm understanding of the recruitment model employed

by the widget makers/recruiters. To achieve both goals, I held an informational gathering session with all widget makers/recruiters. To this date, our conversation was one of the most insightful, refreshing, and honest that I've had in my 40 years of employment, because the exchange encapsulated lessons learned that still are indelibly etched into my memory.

The most salient lesson learned came from the widget makers/recruiters lines of inquiry, they asked: Why is the agency employing "special" efforts to hire minorities or diverse employees? If they (the diverse employees) were as competent as us, why would we have to *find* them, and then use special efforts to *hire* them?

These young and bold widget makers/recruiters asked the questions that were swirling around in the minds of many leaders, yet they dared not do so. Leaders wanted responses (many still do), but they felt that they were prevented from openly seeking answers because of political correctness, or because they intuited that doing so would be revelatory about them (absent their intent), and harmful to their careers.

Here's the bottom line: We, diversity practitioners, must move away from a model of diversity that involves "labeling." We should not identify geographical areas that an organization never has explored for employable talent as "diversity targets." It's just that simple. The *terra incognita* for talented, competitive, and competent employees is vast; therefore, the recruitment actions to seek them should be infinite. As my Pastor the Honorable Dr. Howard-John Wesley says, "everyone who lives in poverty isn't dumb, and everybody with money isn't smart." Hiring a graduate of an HBCU, using inclusive hiring practices, doesn't render them (the HBCU graduate) less competitive, less ingenious, or less capable.

Newsflash: Stop utilizing a model of diversity that relies on the integration of seemingly benign language; yet, when administered it is a form of signaling that is effectively harming the career trajectory and employment opportunities of those for whom it purportedly is designed to help. Chirlane McCray says, "Labels put people in boxes, and those boxes are shaped like coffins." As diversity practitioners, should we build boxes or facilitate the development of careers?

Forthcoming articles from Dr. Ridley:

Part II: Let Diversity Die. Now, What Emerges from the Ashes? Achieving Total Organizational Excellence with Inclusive Processes and Systems.

Part III: The Known Unknown? Let's Get Real: It's Known. Can an Organization Achieve Excellence Through the Implementation of "Inclusive" Processes that "Exclude" White Men? Bottom line up front: No.

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