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SUCCESS

Fall 2013

Federal Workforce Diversity

Closing the Achievement Gap

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3711 Lomita Blvd. Suite 196, Torrance CA 90505
Email: info@mspg.org

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THE LAW OF THREE HELPS YOU HIRE THE BEST PEOPLE

By: Tom Borg

In the first part of this article we discussed that to find the best employee you first needed to:

- Create the right ad.
- Have a clear detailed description of the ideal candidate for the position.
- Look in the right places to find the right person.

In part II of this article, we are going to share some strategies to effectively interview your job candidates.

Business development expert, Brian Tracy suggests, that whenever you are hiring a new person, to use the Law of Three. Simply put, this law is:

- Interview at least three candidates for any job.
- Interview the candidate you like most at least 3 times.
- Interview the person in at least three different locations.
- Each interview should be at three different times of the

day.

- Have three different staff people interview the finalists one time.
- Interview at least three people this person has worked for in the past.

It makes sense that you interview at least three people for any job for which you want to hire a new person. It is much too easy to hire the first person who looks and sounds like they would

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work out, only to find out later they were not a good fit. Most employees come with some flaws, and you won't be able to detect any of them if you are overly eager to fill a job.

Once you feel you have an excellent candidate, interview him or her at least three times. This will give you the opportunity to get an honest impression of who they really are, and if they are truly the best fit for the job. One of the biggest hiring mistakes happens when the owner hires someone who reminds him of himself. Somehow, he believes that since this person resembles his enthusiasm or himself in his younger days, that he must be the right candidate for the job.

By interviewing prospects for a job in different locations and at three different times of the day, you can get a clearer impression of their strengths and weaknesses. Let's face it, some people are better morning people than afternoon people. Some

people look good the first time because they make a special effort to give a good first impression. But by the second or third time you talk with them, they don't seem to shine as well.

When you interview them in different settings they look and behave differently. If you were to interview them at your office, they may exhibit certain tendencies. When you interview them at a restaurant, they may reveal different characteristics that may or may not be so desirable.

The suggestion of having at least three different staff people interview a finalist, allows you to get a different perspective of what this person is like. When people closer to the job candidate's age or of the same gender chat with this person, they see different sides of his or her personality. This can go a long way in helping you get an accurate snapshot of this job candidate's behavior style and the ability to fit in to your

company's culture.

The last area I would like to discuss in this article is checking

references by talking to at least three of the individual's past employers. One of my clients, a human resource director, shared with me how they had learned the hard way that people who apply for jobs do not always tell the truth. One applicant who they had hired completely fooled them. As it turns out, this person claimed to have a certain computer programming certification and expertise and just didn't. In other words this person lied. The individual thought that once they got hired, no one would be able to tell, and he could just fake his way through his new job. Yes, they did have to fire him, and yes, it was an expensive mistake. From that point forward they have been very slow and cautious to hire until they have thoroughly interviewed, checked references and done a background check.

Although expensive, background checks and drug testing are mandatory as they often reveal significant flaws or baggage the potential candidate is bringing to the table.

It would seem, at first, that this is an almost overly conservative approach to hiring, but when you stop to consider the consequences of hiring the wrong person, it is not. It is just plain good business sense.

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When it comes to checking with at least three of the applicant's last employers, Brian Tracy makes another excellent suggestion. While it is true that most references selected are those people who would say positive things about the job candidate, there is one question you can legally ask, and it will tell you much more about the quality of the person being interviewed. Tracy's question is: "Would you hire this person back again?"

The type of response you get, including how long of a pause there is between your question and the person's reply is like gold. If you get the impression the job applicant was not the most valued employee at his or her previous job, make a special note. By checking with three different employers, you should get a pretty good picture of what kind of a performer this person actually was.

With one organization that I consulted, they made it a practice to have the option that if after all interviews were completed, they didn't find the right candidate, not to hire anyone. They would simply repost the position and wait for a fresh group of applicants. When you stop to consider the cost and aggravation of hiring the wrong person, this makes total sense.

So, by taking your time and using these strategies in the hiring process, you will be building a foundation to hire the best possible person for the job. In the end you will create a win-win-win situation. That is, your company wins, the new hire wins and your customers will all be winners.

Next time we will discuss how to insure your new hire's success. Until then, feel free to call me with any questions.

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Minority outreach ensures business with future market

By: Joanne Sammer

Plans must adapt to changing demographics

WHEN INSURANCE EXCHANGES

come online, many new Healthcare consumers will be members of minority populations with distinct needs. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act aims to reduce disparity in healthcare delivery by

accelerating data collection, funding community health centers and increasing racial and ethnic diversity among clinical professionals.

Minority outreach is an important long term need for another reason. As much as 98% of the population growth in major metropolitan areas is occurring in minority groups, according to Witt/Kieffer.

“The demographics of the United States are changing,” says Gary Puckrein, president of the National

Minority Quality Forum in Washington, D.C. “What is now thought of as a minority “with about 40% of the market “will be the majority of the American market *within the next few decades. Understanding these populations is important because they have historically consumed healthcare differently.”

In other words, there are likely to be long term financial consequences if health plans don’t figure out how to help these populations access the

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healthcare system and manage their health.

QUALITY OF CARE

An important opportunity in healthcare reform is to improve access and quality of care, both of which are needed for underserved populations. The National Healthcare Disparities Report 2010, published by the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, gauges the quality of and access to care among different populations.

The study found that African

Americans, American Indians and Alaska Natives received worse care than “whites for about 40% of the core measures; Asians received “worse care than “whites for about 20% of core measures; and Hispanics received “worse care than non Hispanic “whites for about 60% of core measures. African Americans also had “worse access to care for one third of core measures; Asians, American Indians and Alaska Natives for 20% of core measures; and Hispanics for 83% of core measures.

For example, one core measure

tracks hospital patients “with heart failure “who received recommended

hospital care.

In certain parts of the country, it’s difficult to get an appointment with a primary care physician. Access has gotten so bad that the state of Maryland is creating Health Enterprise Zones offering tax credits and financial incentives to bring doctors and other care providers into underserved areas, especially those where minority populations reside.

“The sustainability of our healthcare system will depend on our ability to address healthcare disparity,” says Sinsi Hernández Gancio, health equity director with Families USA in Washington, D.C.

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Individuals in minority populations are generally more likely to suffer from chronic diseases, like diabetes and high blood pressure, that are expensive to treat, can be life shortening and have a major impact on quality of life and productivity. Environmental factors and issues related to low incomes can also contribute to chronic conditions in minority communities, acting as a barrier to healthcare.

Minority populations have historically under consumed healthcare services, and often forgo or cannot gain access to preventive care and treatment for chronic conditions. Instead, they “wait either by choice or circumstance until their condition is acute and advanced. This lack of care creates higher rates of hospitalization and higher than necessary costs when individuals do seek care.

Insurance coverage alone is unlikely to be enough to address these issues. Minorities with health

insurance are still less likely to get treated and be compliant “when they have a chronic condition, even when they do receive treatment, says Puckrein.

ADDRESSING BARRIERS

Health plans that want to launch or expand minority outreach programs need to address several issues, including culture and language, in order to effectively help people understand their plans and how to use their plans appropriately.

Each population is also likely to have its own health risks. For example, Vietnamese “women have a higher incidence of cervical cancer complications than women in other racial populations. The Hispanic population tends to have high rates of diabetes and its complications, including heart disease, hypertension and stroke.

Some health plans are working to understand these differences and address them in educational outreach efforts targeted toward specific minority populations.

“You can’t standardize diversity and say that all of our diverse populations need this,” says Russell Bennett, vice president of Latino Health Solutions at United Healthcare. “Each population may need different things.”

United Healthcare works closely with its employer groups on outreach. In many cases, this outreach must begin with the basics, such as helping covered individuals understand how the healthcare and insurance systems “work.

A simple explanation can help, Bennett says. Some minorities might not see the value of insurance, or assume they can sign up as needed as opposed to during an open enrollment.

United Healthcare has developed a

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dedicated Web site using Spanish as its default language, although users can switch to English. The plan also installed worksite kiosks for major employers, each providing interactive bilingual modules that educate individuals on specific health issues.

The plan also placed kiosks out in the community. Kiosks in the offices of the Albuquerque (N.M.) Hispano Chamber of Commerce cater specifically to the needs of small business owners and employees coming into the office.

Bennett also cites efforts by large employer Pitney Bowes. Addressing concerns that its Hispanic employees *were not taking health risk assessments as often as other employees, the company installed kiosks in six of its major *worksites. The company also allows employees to get a discount on their health insurance premiums upon completion of United Healthcare's bilingual, interactive health modules.

EFFORTS ANALYZED

To measure the impact of these efforts, United Healthcare has developed a portfolio of plans in eight states with significant Hispanic populations Florida, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Colorado, Utah and Illinois. All plan documents and communications, including health and wellness materials, were made available in Spanish.

By analyzing the behaviors and outcomes of plans in Texas, California, Arizona and Florida, the plan found that Hispanic members in the portfolio plans have better screening behaviors and are getting higher levels of prenatal care. They're also identifying hypertension and diabetes earlier than Hispanic members in plans that don't emphasize the availability of Spanish language materials and outreach.

Despite the success of certain outreach efforts, there is still a long "way to go, because minority populations have been underrepresented in overall healthcare strategies.

"Health plans play a very pivotal role in how that will play out going forward," Puckrein says.

MHE EXECUTIVE VIEW

* Minority groups consume healthcare differently, and plans will need to adjust.

* Improving access and quality of care is necessary.

* Address cultural barriers before reaching out.

Federal Workforce Diversity: Why Agencies Seek Out Minority Workers

By: Dan Woog

Minority representation in the federal workforce continues to outstrip participation in civilian jobs with one exception: Hispanics, who are significantly underrepresented in federal jobs. But all minority applicants face challenges in government hiring and advancement.

The degree of difficulty varies widely based on a number of factors, as demonstrated by the following statistics. They were summarized from the Federal Equal

Opportunity Recruitment Program report (FEORP) for fiscal year 2004 that was released to Congress in May 2005.

African Americans make up 17.4 percent of the federal workforce, as compared to 10.1 percent of the civilian labor force. But the percentage of African Americans drops dramatically with each rise in job grade. They hold 27.6 percent of the lowest positions (GS 1-4), 25.8 percent of GS 5-8, 15.7 percent of GS 9-12, 10.9 percent of GS 13-15 and just 6.9

percent of Senior Pay levels.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders represent 4.9 percent of federal employees and 4 percent of the civilian workforce. They too are underrepresented at Senior Pay levels, representing 5.9 percent of GS 1-4 pay grades but just 2.6 percent at the Senior Pay grade.

American Indians form 1.9 percent of the federal workforce but make up 0.8 percent of the civilian labor force. Job grade participation ranges from 5

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percent at GS 1-4 to 2.9 percent at GS 5-8 to only 0.8 percent at the Senior Pay level.

Hispanics make up just 7.3 percent of the federal workforce versus 12.6 percent of the civilian labor force. They hold about 9 percent of the GS 1-4 and 5-8 job grade positions and 3.4 percent of Senior Pay-level jobs.

Representation Among Agencies and Departments

Minority hiring patterns also vary by government agency and department when representation is compared to that in relevant civilian job roles.

According to the 2004 FEORP report, African Americans are well represented at the departments of Education, Housing and Urban Development, Veterans Affairs and Treasury.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are similarly represented in the US Navy, Department of Commerce, the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

American Indians are concentrated in the departments of Health and Human Services and Interior, the Social Security Administration and the Smithsonian Institution.

Finally, Hispanics/Latinos are prominent at the Department of Homeland Security and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission as well as the Social Security Administration.

Why the Discrepancies?

“The tools are there to hire more Hispanics, but not the will,” says Manuel Oliverez, president of the National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives. “There are no rewards or accolades for hiring and promoting Hispanics and no punishment if you don’t. The

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government job market is tight, and requirements for hiring are tough.”

For African Americans in government, “it can be hard to move up the ladder, especially into SES [Senior Executive Service] positions, if you don’t have a mentor,” says Farrell Chiles, chair of the National Organization of Blacks in Government. “A lot of African Americans leave government for better opportunities in corporate America, where the only thing that matters is what you can add to the bottom line.”

Chiles notes that while many agencies encourage African

Americans to take tests and advance in grade, “we’re often competing against other minorities, or veterans.”

Dan Archuleta, chairman of the American Indian Program Council, a subcommittee of the Denver Federal Executive Board, attributes part of the fact that American Indians are concentrated in a few government agencies to geography and history. “There is a lot of resistance among Native Americans to moving to cities,” he says. “And some people are just not willing to work for the government, because it’s the government.”

Archuleta’s group works on creative ways to encourage American Indians

to consider government employment, such as attending powwows to distribute information about

164 federal agencies.

Advice for Minority Federal Job Seekers

Each minority group’s advocates stress the importance of increasing its representation in the federal workforce. “The business of government is to provide services to citizens and residents,” says Jorge Ponce, cochair of the Council of Federal Equal Employment Opportunity and Civil Rights Executives. “People need to participate directly in institutions that affect their lives.”

To enhance your chances of landing a government job, Ponce suggests networking with friends, relatives and associates to discover openings in departments or agencies. Applicants should also be sure to submit all required documents and forms. “With the government, it’s not enough to have nine things if they want 10,” he says.

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How important is cultural diversity at your school?

Attending a school with a diverse student body can help prepare your child for citizenship in a multicultural democracy.

As the United States becomes a more culturally and ethnically diverse nation, public schools are becoming more diverse, too.

A growing trend

The Census Bureau projects that by the year 2100, the U.S. minority population will become the majority with non-Hispanic whites making up only 40% of the U.S. population. No doubt students will need to learn how to interact in a diverse environment. Jean Snell, clinical professor of teacher education at the University of Maryland, believes cultural diversity enhances the school experience, too. "There is a richness that comes from students working side by side with others who are not of the same cookie-cutter mold," she notes.

Students who attend schools with a diverse population can develop an understanding of the perspectives of children from different backgrounds and learn to function in a multicultural, multiethnic environment. Yet, as public schools become more diverse, demands increase to find the most effective ways to help all students succeed academically as well as learn to get along with each other. Teachers are faced with the challenge of making instruction "culturally responsive" for all students while not favoring one group over another. A 2007 study by Public Agenda and the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality found that 76% of new teachers say they were trained to teach an ethnically diverse student body but fewer than 4 in 10 say their training helps them deal with the challenges they face.

Schools must take a proactive approach to acknowledging diversity

A parent needs to look beyond the numbers to evaluate a school's approach to diversity.

To create a positive environment where students and teachers are respectful of different backgrounds, schools have to be proactive. "Above all, schools shouldn't just do nothing," says Rosemary Henze, associate professor of linguistics and language development at San Jose State University in California and author of *Leading for Diversity: How*

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School Leaders Promote Positive Interethnic Relations.

Structured classroom activities can highlight diversity.

She suggests that teachers structure their teaching to acknowledge different perspectives. For example, in a history lesson about the Vietnam War, they should draw attention to the perspectives of North as well as South Vietnamese citizens, the feelings of the soldiers and diverse views of

Americans. In a classroom the teacher can structure learning groups that are diverse and devise activities that require each student to contribute to the group. In this way students learn that each person in a group can contribute and has something of value to say.

Mutual respect is part of the equation.

Henze believes teachers should never tolerate disrespect. They should establish ground rules for the class, and even let the kids help to establish these rules.

She also believes the principal has a huge role in creating an environment where people respect the opinions of

others and are open to multiple perspectives on any issue. This should be modeled for students, and in relations with faculty and staff, as well.

No Child Left Behind shines the light on achievement gaps among diverse groups of students.

The federal No Child Left Behind law has put pressure on schools to see that all students succeed, regardless of their ethnic or language background. Schools are required to meet state "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) goals for their total student populations and for specified demographic subgroups, including major ethnic/racial groups, economically disadvantaged students, limited English proficient (LEP) students, and students with disabilities. If these schools fail to meet AYP goals for two or more

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years, they are classified as schools “in need of improvement” and face consequences. A broad approach works best to address achievement gaps.

Belinda Williams, an education researcher and co-author of *Closing the Achievement Gap: A Vision for Changing Beliefs and Practices*, advises school leaders to implement a broad range of strategies to improve teaching and learning, rather than instituting quick fixes to address the achievement gap. The book argues that educators must become more sensitive to the world views of disadvantaged students — and incorporate this awareness into their day-to-day work.

Henze sees value in organizing special events at the school that raise awareness about diversity but warns that “these events should be built into the fabric of the school, rather than being a one-shot deal.”

Schools should strive to create an environment where all children feel valued and all children can learn. Snell says the principal should set the tone by having a policy of “no excuses.” If there is a problem with a particular student, she says principals and teachers should ask themselves, “What do we need to do to ensure that this child is engaged in learning?” and “What more can we do?” This may mean following up to see that the student has the proper place to study, healthy meals and all the support he needs.

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What Does It Take To Create Career Satisfaction and Life Fulfillment?

By: Cheryl Leitschuh

Many are always asking me what are the simple tips to creating career satisfaction and life fulfillment? My experience tells me there are five important factors necessary to creating these realities.

1. TIME:

Determining your career vision and plan is not a “fast food” endeavor. In this era of speed, this is one area that requires your time and attention. I have had some people work intensively for several days and reach their vision and plan.

I have had some spread the process out over several weeks and spend several hours each week in pursuit of this vision and plan. Either way, it takes time. The first step is to give yourself permission and patience to take the time you need to create a vision and plan based on wisdom, not speed.

2. AWARENESS:

The amount of time you need is directly related to how aware you are of your wisdom. If you have not taken much time to listen to yourself. OR, if you are like most of us and have not

had a clue what to listen to, you will need more time. In the process of awareness comes the need to be open to ourselves about what we need, want, know and desire.

3. ARTICULATION:

From the awareness comes the next step which is to articulate our awareness. About what, you say? We need to understand and articulate what we know in the following areas:

-Career Development: What we know from our past experience that leads us to better choices now.

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-Abilities: What comes natural and easy to us. The hardwiring of how we operate.

-Skills: What we have learned. The software we have added to our knowledge base.

-Interests: The things that bring us passion and enjoyment

-Personal Style: Our style, personality, temperament and what our environment needs to honor this style.

-Beliefs: What beliefs we hold about success, career, achieving life fulfillment, etc. Often these come from our family of origin.

-Values: Those guiding forces that are key to our life decisions.

-Goals: What do we want to achieve?

It is much like building a stir-fry. We need to take the time to chop the ingredients before we can begin to create the final product.

4. INTEGRATION:

Pulling together the ingredients from above into a vision and a plan to move forward. This “product” comes from YOU. There is not one expert in the world who can tell you what this needs to be. That is why we need the time and patience to listen to ourselves. The result is a powerful,

energizing and unique creation that will move you forward to further career satisfaction and life fulfillment.

5. EXPERIENCE:

No matter how wise we are, evaluated experience is a great teacher. Life continues to move and we continue to integrate new experience and knowledge into our wisdom. Unless we EVALUATE this new data and allow it to move our decisions and choices, the creation we developed in step 4 soon becomes stagnate. Taking the time to evaluate, make new choices and transform our future focus, keeps the vision and plan powerful, energizing and unique.

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Social Networking and Success

By: *Bud Bilanich*

If you want to create positive personal impact, you need to do three things.

- 1) Create and nurture your unique personal brand.
- 2) Be impeccable in your presentation of self — in person and on line.
- 3) Know and follow the basic rules of etiquette.

Even if you're not in business for yourself, you need to have a personal brand and a web presence

to create positive personal impact. These days, I hear the question, "If you don't exist on line, do you really exist?" That's a good question. Prospective employers will Google you. You'll be better off, if they like what they see. It's much better than if they find unfavorable results or nothing at all. Today when people want to learn about you most of their answers usually come from Google.

This can be pretty scary — if you don't take the time to make sure that you have an internet presence that reflects well on you. The best place to begin is with your unique personal brand. Your personal brand highlights

what is special and unique about you — why you are not a commodity.

For my money, the best book on personal branding is *Career Distinction* by William Arruda and Kirsten Dixson. They stress the importance of the "Three C's" — Clarity, Consistency and Constancy. You can use the internet to help you with all three C's.

I'm a big believer in social networking sites to help you build your brand online. LinkedIn, Facebook, MySpace are great places to build relationships with like-minded people. I believe that

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LinkedIn is best for building professional relationships. Choose the social network where you have the greatest affinity with the people who are on it.

Leaving comments on targeted blogs is another good way to build your brand on line. This means that you read blogs that are tied to your field or area of expertise and comment on posts that interest you. I used to be bad about this. I read quite a few blogs, but commented very infrequently. I set a goal to leave at least five comments on blogs per day. That's 25 comments a week. I've stuck to it, and it has paid off. I have raised my web presence by commenting on other people's blogs. Of course, I am in business for myself, and my web presence is very important to me.

You don't have to do 25 comments a week. Start small, one comment a day is reasonable. I think that if you have limited time, you are better off starting your own blog and posting two or three times a week. This will

also boost your web presence and enhance your personal brand. This assumes, of course, that you have something to say. And, in my opinion, everyone has something to say.

On line book reviews are another way to build your brand. Do you read a lot? If so, take a few minutes and review books that you like on Amazon. Because I blog about books quite a bit, I have started to receive review copies from major publishing houses. A while back, I decided to post only positive reviews. If I don't like a book, I don't do a negative review. I do this because there are enough interesting, well written books out there. I choose to focus on them instead of bashing those books (however few) I don't like. If you begin writing reviews, you too, may start receiving free books to review.

The common sense point here is simple. Use the internet to build your personal brand by paying attention to your internet presence. Focus on the "three C's" — clarity, Consistency, and Constancy when building your brand — both on line and off line. Make sure your web presence reflects the person you want others — especially those who don't know you — to see. Besides presenting yourself well, you can do a number of things to amp up your web presence. Write a blog, comment on other people's blogs. Review books on Amazon.com. Having a lot of hits come up when someone Google's you is a good thing.

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Closing the achievement gap

Could a 15-minute intervention boost ethnic-minority student achievement?

By: Lea Winerman

By pretty much any measure, Cupertino High School in northern California is a successful place. Perched in the heart of Silicon Valley, Cupertino sent 85 percent of its senior class to college in 2009. Hundreds of its students choose among a dozen advanced placement classes each year. By and large, Cupertino's kids are doing well.

But some are doing better than others. On average, students at Cupertino far exceed California's target on the state's Academic Performance Index measure. The target is 800; Cupertino students

scored 893. But Latino students, who make up 10 percent of the school's population, averaged a score of 780, just under the statewide goal.

Cupertino High School is far from alone. For decades, educators have struggled to close the "achievement gap," the persistent differences in test scores, grades and graduation rates among students of different races, ethnicities and, in some subjects, genders.

In fact, Cupertino's achievement gap may be smaller than average. Nationwide, the data are striking: 94

percent of white young adults have earned a high school degree by age 24, but only 87 percent of blacks and 78 percent of Latinos have done the same, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. A 2009 U.S. Department of Education review found that black fourth- and eighth-graders scored lower than their white counterparts on math and reading in every state for which data were available. Some of the differences can be explained by socioeconomic factors, but not all.

Educators have been chewing over the problem for decades. Many of the solutions they've proposed have

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been large-scale teaching or curriculum reforms that are time-consuming, expensive or both. Meanwhile, despite some successes in individual schools and programs, the nationwide achievement gap has narrowed only slightly in the past decade.

But recently, a group of social and cognitive psychologists have come at the problem in a different way. These psychologists' approach is based on the idea that at least some of these academic disparities aren't the result of faulty teaching or broken school systems, but instead spring from toxic stereotypes that cause ethnic-minority and other students to question whether they belong in school and whether they can do well there. While such a major problem might seem to require widespread social change to fix, the psychologists are finding evidence that short, simple interventions can make a surprisingly large difference. Quick classroom exercises that bolster students' resistance to

stereotypes and change the way they think about learning can have dramatically out-of-scale effects, these researchers say.

And indeed, they've gotten dramatic results. In one of the best-known studies, low-performing black middle school students who completed several 15-minute classroom writing exercises raised their GPAs by nearly half a point over two years, compared with a control group.

Such astonishing results have struck some observers—particularly nonpsychologists—as nearly magical, and possibly unbelievable. But a growing body of evidence is showing that the interventions can work, not only among black middle school students, but also for women, minority college students and other populations.

“When this was first described to me, I was skeptical,” says physics professor Michael Dubson, PhD, of the University of Colorado–Boulder, who worked with psychologists there on a study with women physics students. “But now that I think about it, we all know that it’s possible to damage a student in 15 minutes. It’s easy to wreck someone’s self-esteem. So if that’s possible, then maybe it’s also possible to improve it.”

Stereotype threat

Many of the new interventions are based on the concept of “stereotype

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threat,” first identified by psychologist Claude Steele, PhD, in the mid-1990s. He showed that when people who are about to take a test are reminded of negative stereotypes about their racial, ethnic or other group, the subconscious worry that they might confirm those stereotypes undermines their performance by sapping cognitive resources that they could be using to do better on the exam.

Psychologist Geoffrey Cohen, PhD, now at Stanford University, wondered if there might be a way to inoculate students against the effects of stereotype threat by buffering their sense of self-worth and positive identity. He and his colleagues Julio Garcia, PhD, and Valerie Purdie-Vaughns, PhD, tested their theory at a suburban, low-to-middle-income middle school in Connecticut that was about half black and half white. At the beginning of the school year, about 400 seventh-graders spent 15 minutes doing a classroom writing exercise. Half of the students were

asked to pick a personal value, such as athletic ability or relationships with friends and family, and then write about why that value mattered to them. A control group wrote about why a value that didn’t matter to them might be important to someone else. The students did the exercise one or two times at the beginning of the school year.

In a study published in *Science* in 2006 (Vol. 313, No. 5791), the researchers found that the short exercise reduced the achievement gap between the black and white students in the class by up to 40 percent over one school term, and that it was particularly effective for low-achieving black students, halving the percentage of black students who got a D or below in the class.

Three years later, Cohen and his colleagues published a follow-up paper in *Science* (Vol. 324, No. 5925) in which they tracked the original group of students through the eighth grade. Amazingly, the effect lasted—the low-achieving black students who had

completed the values-affirmation exercises raised their GPAs by four-tenths of a point (on a four-point scale) compared with the control group, and were less likely to need to repeat a grade. The intervention didn’t have any effect on white or high-achieving black students.

What was going on? Cohen hypothesizes that the exercise started a self-reinforcing loop. It strengthened students psychologically at a crucial time, right at the beginning of the school year. By reminding them of something personal that mattered to them, it reduced their stress level and pushed down the distracting worries, brought on by stereotype threat, that they might not measure up. Because of that, they were able to do better on one crucial first exam or homework assignment. Doing well early on boosted their resilience to stereotypes even more, leading to another successful test—and, perhaps, permanently changing their academic trajectory.

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Researchers don't yet know the precise cognitive mechanisms at work in the study, says cognitive psychologist Akira Miyake, PhD, of the University of Colorado-Boulder, who has worked with Cohen on the research. But he hypothesizes that pushing down extraneous worries could increase the amount of working memory that students have available to concentrate on schoolwork.

Since Cohen's first studies, he and other researchers have tested the model in other populations, including among female physics students. Women in science face some of the same stereotypes, and achievement gaps, that blacks and Latinos face in the rest of academia. In 2008, women earned only 20 percent of the bachelor's degrees and 18 percent of the doctorates awarded in physics, according to the American Physical Society, even though they earned nearly 60 percent of bachelor's degrees overall.

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Miyake and psychologist Tiffany Ito, PhD, along with Cohen, had about 400 students in an introductory physics class at the University of Colorado–Boulder complete a personal-value writing exercise similar to the one used in the Connecticut middle school study. The college physics students did the exercise twice, once during the first week of the semester and once right before the first exam.

In a study published in *Science* in 2010 (Vol. 330, No. 6008), the researchers found that women who did the self-affirmation exercise did significantly better in the class: Among the control group, about 60 percent of the women earned C's and less than 30 percent earned B's. In the self-affirmation group, as many women earned B's as earned C's. The exercise didn't affect men's grades in the class.

Dubson, the physics professor who taught the class and who was initially skeptical about the

intervention, was blown away by the results.

“Holy mackerel, most of our curriculum is based on the theory that the most important thing in learning is ‘time on task,’ because learning is messy and hard,” he says. “I can’t think of anything else that you could do in 30 minutes that would have a measurable effect on exam scores.”

Other brief interventions, based on related psychological concepts, have also shown promise for reducing achievement gaps. For example, many students face a tough transition to college, but minority students have an added complication: stereotypes that undermine their sense that they belong on campus. A black student struggling to adapt during his first year of college might subconsciously feel that his social or academic troubles were due to race rather than normal freshman jitters. In one recent study, Stanford psychology professor Gregory Walton, PhD, with Cohen, found that boosting a sense of belonging among black college

freshmen could improve the students' grades all the way through their senior year. In the study, published in March in *Science* (Vol. 331, No. 6,023), Walton and Cohen asked 90 black and white college freshmen to read vignettes, purportedly written by older students, describing how school was difficult at first but how eventually they found their social and academic niche. Then the participants had to write essays about what they had just read. A control group read vignettes unrelated to social belonging.

The goal was to change students' attitudes about their sense of fitting in, and to subtly let them know that their “fish-out-of-water” worries were common to all students, and not a sign that they weren't meant for college. It worked. Over the next three years, the black students in the treatment group earned GPAs nearly one-third of a point higher, on average, than those in the control group—roughly halving the black-white achievement gap.

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Scaling up

In science, the proof is in the replication. So right now, Cohen, Miyake and the other psychologists are again working with physics professor Michael Dubson to replicate their “women in college physics” study.

During the original study, the personal-value writing exercise went smoothly. But this time, a student presented Dubson with a problem. After the first writing exercise, the student came up to Dubson and said, “Hey, I know what you’re doing—I’ve read about this research.”

Dubson asked her not to tell her classmates about the purpose of the writing exercise, and no other student mentioned knowing anything about the research. But the glitch illustrates a challenge for psychologists: If these interventions became more common, and students—

particularly older, savvier students—started to recognize them, would they still work?

Some evidence suggests they wouldn’t, at least not as well. In one study, published in 2009 in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (Vol. 97, No. 5), Cohen and University of California–Santa Barbara, psychologist David Sherman, PhD, found that a self-affirmation exercise didn’t work as well when they told the participants that the point of the exercise was to boost self-worth. That might be because telling them the purpose of the exercise caused them to see it as simply a means to an end, the researchers suggest, which undermined its self-affirming punch.

The question of whether students could “know too much” about these interventions is just one issue among many that psychologists are facing as they aim to scale up the research from a trial in a single classroom to a school-wide or school-district-wide intervention.

Other issues may be even thornier. For example: How do we know that what works in one context will work in another? Most of these interventions have been tested in one classroom or one school. Usually, those classrooms are diverse—they include both men and women, or both black or Latino and white students, in order to let the researchers compare the groups. But many classrooms around the country are ethnically and racially homogeneous. Would an intervention designed and tested in a diverse school also work in a homogeneous one? Researchers don’t yet know.

Along the same lines, will something that works with elementary school students translate to high school or college students, and will something that works with college students translate to lower grades? Much more refining and testing needs to be done to find out, the researchers say.

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And what about delivering the interventions? The psychologists who design them can't be around to train every teacher, as they are during their experiments. And as Dubson's experience shows, the experiments depend on some subtlety on the teachers' part. They must be able to explain convincingly to students why they're doing the writing exercises, without giving away the real purpose. Could teachers be trained to do that effectively on a large scale?

Figuring out the answers to these questions is important, says Purdie-Vaughns, who has worked on several of the values-affirmation studies with Geoffrey Cohen, because scaling up this research is what really matters in the end. Purdie-Vaughns spent her first years after college working with disadvantaged elementary school students for the I Have a Dream Foundation. Trying to figure out what was holding those children back academically is what drew her to graduate school in psychology. Now that her research and others' is providing some answers, Purdie-Vaughns is eager to figure out how to move the knowledge from the lab to the school district.

"I think the delivery is as important as the basic science behind this research," she says.

She's been traveling the country, talking to teachers and school district officials who are interested in working with her on larger-scale intervention studies.

Stanford graduate student Dave Paunesku, meanwhile, is working on the delivery issue from another angle. He's developing online versions of the interventions that students can access from home or school computers. He's aiming to test the program in at least 50 schools next year.

He's already begun testing in nearby Cupertino High School, where Principal Kami Tomberlain says the work fits perfectly with the school's philosophy.

"I think it points to the self-fulfilling prophecy of stereotypes, and the way that people can swallow what's being said about them without even noticing that they're doing it," she says. "That's one of the things we [teachers] talk about all the time here. How can we communicate that what we're teaching is important, and that they're all capable of learning it?"

The psychologists, meanwhile, know that their research by itself won't solve the achievement gap for Tomberlain and other educators.

"I think it's really important to understand that this is not a silver bullet," says Walton. "If you delivered a great [psychological] intervention but the teaching was terrible, the intervention would have no effect."

But in the right places, under the right circumstances, these interventions might just make a difference in students' lives.

Nailing the Interview: Six Ways to Make a Good Impression

By: Kelli Smith

In a slow economy, every job interview can be a precious opportunity. Whatever your qualifications, assume there are other strong candidates competing for the same job. If you've been called in for an interview, then congratulations—it typically means you've at least made the short list based on how your background looks on paper. Whether or not you get the job, however, may depend on the impression you make in person.

Interviewing well is a form of performance. You have to prepare, and you have to put your full energy

and attention into it when the time comes.

Interviewing Takes Preparation

Here are six ways you can make the most out of every interviewing opportunity:

1. Be prepared.

Doing well in an interview starts before your actual appointment. Do some research on the company in advance, and try to anticipate likely questions. Run through ways of

answering those questions in a positive and honest way. Know what the company dress code is so you can wear something appropriate—and when in doubt, wear a suit. It's usually better to err on the side of seeming more professional rather than too casual. Most important of all, be on time. Work out the logistics of transportation, parking, and potential hold-ups like security check-ins in advance. Aim to arrive five or ten minutes early, so you can use the rest room to give your appearance one last check before meeting the interviewer.

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2. Be friendly, but professional.

Be sure to treat everyone you meet, including receptionists and assistants, with respect. This means being friendly and polite, but not too informal, chummy, or especially, flirtatious. You never know whose opinions get listened to once you've left the building. When it comes time to meet the interviewer, smile, make eye contact, and shake hands firmly but not aggressively. Observe small courtesies like not sitting down until the interviewer does. Throughout the interview, don't let your eyes wander around the room too much, and sit up in a manner that reflects energy and attentiveness.

3. Take cues from the interviewer.

In addition to paying attention to what the interviewer says, pay attention to how he or she acts. Some people's interviewing style is more informal than others, and you should follow suit—though never get drawn into loosening up too much. Also, if the interviewer seems pressed for time, be sure to give concise answers and don't interject more than is necessary.

4. Ask the right questions.

You should ask questions that demonstrate a serious interest in the job. That's where some of that advance preparation can come in—you can demonstrate some familiarity

with the company in the questions you ask. Those questions should be about the nature of the business and how the area for which you are interviewing operates. Do not ask questions about pay and benefits—that's

a discussion you should have when and if you are offered the job. In particular, try to avoid asking about vacation time during the interview. It can create a bad impression when you haven't even started to work and already your mind is on taking a vacation.

5. Structure your answers.

Be careful not to ramble. Give concise answers with a clear, strong conclusion. This can show an organized mind, and leave the interviewer no doubt about what your answers were.

6. Make a strong close.

When it's time to wrap up, thank the interviewer for the meeting and say something complimentary about the company. Finally, shake hands, make eye contact, and state that you really hope to have the opportunity to work for the company. Even if you are ambivalent about the job, close with an expression of interest. You can always decide to turn the job down later, but until then you should do everything you can to put that decision in your hands. Besides, creating a good impression always pays off—it is how you can start to build your professional reputation.



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Success and Failure: Two Sides of the Same Coin

By: Graeme Nichol

Failure is Great

You are probably asking yourself what could be good about failing. Failing means ... well ... that you failed, that you didn't achieve the results you wanted and that things didn't turn out as you hoped. What could be good about that?

The advantage is that you now know one way not to do something. And this is as useful as knowing one way of how to do something.

As Thomas Edison said, "Just because something doesn't do what you planned it to do in the first place doesn't mean it's useless.... Results? Why, man, I have gotten lots of results! If I find 10,000 ways something won't work, I haven't failed. I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is often a step forward...."

Failure is a learning opportunity, but only if you let it be. More often than not failure is seen as something that should be hidden and avoided and never admitted to. How often in your company do you think people make the same mistakes over and over again because no one ever admits to the mistake or examines why the mistake was made.

Would it not be more cost effective and time effective if when a mistake is initially made that it results in a learning opportunity? Each time something doesn't go according to plan think about you could do next time to get the results you want? What was missing? What needs to be added? What needs to change?

Once the answers to the questions have been thoroughly explored with an open mind and no assumptions, then take those learnings and apply

them to the future. Every company should continually strive to learn and improve. Just because a particular method works doesn't mean it is the best one. Strive to improve.

Be prepared to fail and learn - it is the only way forward.

Celebrate Successes

The opposite side of the same coin - success. Just as it is important to analyze your failures and learn from them so it is also important that you celebrate your successes and repeat them.

Every year we strive to do better and be more successful at what we do. Often, however, we only remember successes that are so large that they hit us right in the face, when they are

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so large that everyone else congratulates you. We remember landing a \$100 million dollar account or tripling our profits from the year before or being awarded some Presidential award.

While these are amazing successes that you should definitely celebrate and tell the world about they are not the kind of successes that most of us can hope to achieve. The rest of us need to be happy with the smaller more mundane successes. Successes like generating a profit in our business, getting the client we have been trying to land or simply being thanked by one of our clients for a job well done.

Although these may seem like small successes, lots of small successes like these add up to a successful business, motivated staff and a happy you. Now what if you could repeat each of your small successes so that you could achieve them on a monthly or weekly basis - wouldn't that spell big success for your business?

To achieve that big success you therefore need to celebrate each of your small successes. You need to remember each of them, examine them and find a way of repeating them. Sit down now and think, over the last year, what you did well. Think about what you succeeded in doing, what someone thanked you for, and, where you were appreciated.

Create a list of your successes - no matter how small - examine them to find a way that you could repeat them. What was the essence of the success that would make it repeatable? Break the success into small process steps, think about everything that you did to get to the end point of success. Not just the big steps, think about each little step that was taken.

It is often not the big steps that determine a success - it is the little things. Maybe you wrote a client a thank you letter, or you called a client to see how they were doing. Maybe you referred a client to someone else to solve a problem that you couldn't. You could also have rewarded your staff or done something out of the ordinary for them to make them perform above and beyond.

Think about each success in great detail.

You should now be able to see where you did something differently to achieve the successful result. Your next step is to put together a plan on how you are going to repeat your past successes. Your plan should include each of those necessary steps that resulted in the success.

By understanding and planning for your successes you will be able to repeat them and eventually be able to achieve the large success - a successful business or department.

Plan for success, learn from failures.

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Tips On Giving Better Presentations

By: Tim Millett

Giving presentations can be intimidating, even if you are well prepared. Many people do not enjoy standing in front of a group, using power point, or answering questions afterwards. If you have a job that requires giving frequent presentations, the following tips can help you perfect your techniques so audiences have a better understanding of what you're trying to say.

TIP #1: CREATE INTERESTING VISUALS

Most corporate presentations will require you to use power point, which is a slide show presentation program you can run from your computer. Presentations are not only audio experiences, the visual images you create should give audiences clues in order to understand points you're trying to make. When creating Powerpoint

slides, or any other visuals like prepared flipcharts, you should:

- Include one point per page. Placing too much information on the page or slide will cause people to lose focus and have difficulty understanding what you are saying.
- Using the 7x7 rule (absolutely no more than 7 words per line, and 7 lines per page) can also help in keeping your message succinct and easy to absorb
- Add images, charts, graphs, and other visual aids to help people understand statistics, percentages, and other information.
- Choose one font for headings and one font for content. Be consistent with your font sizes. Make sure they are large enough for people to see from the back of the room.
- Time your presentation to see how long it will take for you to speak and

change slides.

Give printouts of your presentation so everyone can follow along, take notes, or review the information later.

TIP #2: MONITOR YOUR TIME

When speaking to a crowd, most people tend to speak quickly. This can cause others to miss information, so be sure you slow down when this happens. Timing your presentation beforehand will give you a good idea of how fast or slow you need to speak. Practice a few days before and make any changes necessary then.

TIP #3: KNOW YOUR STUFF

The more you know about your topic, the easier it will be to answer questions afterward. Learn as much as

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possible. While you won't use all of the information in your presentation, you will be able to answer most questions.

TIP #4: CRITIQUE YOUR PRESENTATION

If you are comfortable, ask a colleague to critique your performance so you can make adjustments for the next presentation. Many times you cannot see where improvements need to be made because you're busy giving the presentation. Having feedback is a great way to learn more about your strengths and weaknesses.

Over time, your presentation skills will improve. When watching others give a presentation, watch how they handle themselves and try to learn from them.

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The Power of Visualization

By: John Assaraf

Professional athletes and other highly successful people use the power of visualization technique on a regular basis. Why? Results of a 20-year study of the effects of visualization on results revealed an amazing discovery. Humans see pictures on the screen of the mind when thoughts are being processed; i.e. when they think of things.

For example, if a person, let's say, George Right, stopped doing what he was doing right now, closed his eyes and thought of his car. What would he see? Is it the word CAR that pops up on the screen of his mind or a visual image?

Mentally, here's what is actually happening...

George is accessing a memory from his mind that was instilled while he was first learning what a "car" is. Then specifically, his present car popped up. He didn't always know

it was called a car.

Similarly, other humans associate names with images or other forms of stimuli as a way to refer back to them in the mind. And here's an example of why this simple talent is so important.

Let's go back to George for a moment. When he goes to find his car after he's been at a shopping mall, all he is focusing on is finding the image that he has inside his head for his car. He quickly scans the parking lot and with lightning speed eliminates all other cars until he finds the familiar one that he is focused on.

With this example in mind, here is a behind-the-scenes look at how to use visualization to achieve any goal.

- Visualize an outcome you want over and over again to build 'cells of recognition' in

your memory bank, just like you may have had with a car or other learned object when you were younger. This serves in the following two ways.

- First: you become consciously and acutely aware of everything that can help you achieve the visualized outcome that you desire. (Just like looking for a car). You quickly scan over anything that is not in tune with that image. When you continuously focus on an image in your mind, every cell in your body is involved in that image and you vibrate and resonate with everything that is in harmony with that frequency both on a physical and non-physical level. This frequency moves you

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towards, and moves everything that is needed towards you, for the manifestation of the desired image.

- Second: you impress an idea into the subconscious part of you, it eventually becomes 'fixed' and you automatically attract and move towards that which

you desire.

The reason athletes practice visualization is because they want to condition their mind in such a way that the body automatically behaves the way they want it to without effort. It is the only way to become 'unconsciously competent'.

The same is true for highly successful people. If they visualize the success they want over and over again, eventually their bodies will

automatically do whatever it must to make the image a physical reality.

The outside world is a mirror image of the inside and hidden mental world. Unfortunately, very few people have really taken the time to learn this side of their personality. And that is unfortunate because this is the part that is so powerful.

To visualize is to direct unseen energy into an orderly vibration and that is what is needed to manifest desires of the inner self. Desires must first be created in thoughts and then they are created in 'real life'. Humans are the sum of what they think about and focus on most.



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