

**DIVERSITY ISSUES AT THE  
WASHINGTON TOWNSHIP FIRE DEPARTMENT**

**STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE**

By Joseph M. Anderson  
Deputy Chief  
Washington Township Fire Department  
Indianapolis, Indiana

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## ABSTRACT

The problem was a lack of diversity in the Washington Township Fire Department's workforce. The purpose of the research was to determine if the changes that the department made to the hiring and promotional processes beginning in 1992 had been effective, and to determine if methods existed to further improve upon those processes. The research methods utilized were historical and evaluative. Three research questions were answered in this study.

1. How does a diverse workforce assist the fire department in meeting its mission?
2. How successful have the changes in the hiring and promotion processes been in improving the diversity of the fire department's workforce?
3. What further changes can be implemented to improve upon the diversity of the fire department?

The research procedure began with a literature review. United States census information was examined and departmental hiring and promotional records analyzed. An interview with the Deputy Chief responsible for overseeing hiring and promotions at Washington Township was conducted.

The research indicated that a diverse workforce is critical for a fire department to meet its mission, as it affects the department's ability to communicate with the minority community, and to provide improved customer service. The project also found that the department's changes to the hiring and promotional processes had not been successful in increasing the diversity of the workforce. Strategies and methods for improving the department's performance in those areas were identified and recommendations made.

The study concluded that the Washington Township Fire Department could better serve the community if its workforce was more diverse. Current methods for hiring and promoting firefighters were not increasing the diversity of the workforce. Additional strategies were available, that if implemented, would result in a more diverse work place.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The problem is a lack of diversity in the Washington Township Fire Department's workforce. There are 134 firefighters employed by the fire department, three are African-American, three are female, one is Hispanic, and one Asian. All of the other firefighters are white males. All of the administrative officers are white males. No African-American firefighter has risen above the rank of corporal. No female has been promoted beyond private. The Asian firefighter holds the rank of lieutenant. In 1992 the fire department began implementing changes in the hiring and promotional process in an effort to recruit, retain, and promote minorities. The purpose of this research is to determine if those changes have been effective and if procedures exist to improve upon the processes. The research methods utilized are historical and evaluative. Three research questions are answered in this study.

1. How does a diverse workforce assist the fire department in meeting its mission?
2. How successful have the changes in the hiring and promotion processes been in improving the diversity of the fire department's workforce?
3. What further changes can be implemented to improve upon the diversity of the fire department?

## **BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

The Washington Township Fire Department is a 134-member, combination department, located on the north side of Indianapolis in Marion County, Indiana. The department provides fire prevention, fire protection, rescue, hazardous material mitigation, and emergency medical services to a 35 square-mile suburban jurisdiction

with a population of more than 150,000 residents. Services are provided from five fire stations located throughout the township.

The Washington Township Fire Department's hiring, promotional, and disciplinary processes have been regulated since 1982. Merit Law Indiana Code 36-8-3.5 outlines procedures for disciplinary actions, promotional processes, and hiring processes. It also provides for the appointment of a five-member Merit Commission to oversee the rules.

In 1992 the author of this report completed a project that outlined a prima facie case for institutional discrimination at the Washington Township Fire Department. At the time there were 125 firefighters employed by the Washington Township Fire Department. Out of 110 firefighters assigned to company positions, three were African-American, one Hispanic, and one female. Out of 15 positions only one minority, an Asian firefighter who held the rank of lieutenant, was a member of the administrative staff. Two of the minority employees had reached the rank of corporal, two were privates, and the female was a probationary firefighter.

The 1992 report examined the racial and gender-based make up of the fire department's employees and compared them to the demographics of the community that the department serves. The report concluded that changes in the hiring and promotional processes were needed and that a diversity program should be instituted. Because Merit Law controls the hiring and promotional processes, any changes had to be within the confines of the law and meet with the approval of the Merit Commission. Several of the recommendations were adopted in 1992. All change models including the ones presented in the National Fire Academy's Strategic Management of Change class include analysis and evaluation of implemented changes as one of their components. An analysis of the

changes made to the hiring and promotional processes and the effectiveness of the diversity training are necessary if those changes are to be improved upon.

The Washington Township Board has taken an interest in diversity issues. The Township Board is an elected body that together with an elected Trustee oversees Township government including the fire department. In 1996, changes in state law resulted in the expansion of the Board from three to seven members. The new members were elected from specific districts, as compared to the previous Township Board that was elected from the township at large. This changed the board in two significant ways. Two Democrats were elected for the first time and minority representation increased. While the previous Township Board was comprised of three males, one of whom was African-American, the new board has two females and two African-American males.

Creating opportunities for employment and advancement of minorities is an issue for the new board members and the districts they represent. Toward that end, the board has formed a Diversity Committee to explore ways for creating additional career opportunities for minorities. This is another reason for compiling information on the department's progress in this area.

The author of this research project is the Deputy Chief of Operations for the Washington Township Fire Department and a student in the Executive Fire Officer Program. He has been asked by the Fire Chief to re-examine diversity issues and to provide a report to the Town Board Committee on Diversity. One of the subjects studied in the Strategic Management of Change course in the Executive Fire Officer Program is the diversification of the workforce and the threats and opportunities related to the changes. This research project is significant because it will assist the Washington

Township Fire Department in evaluating its approach to diversification issues and will assist other fire officers looking for ways to improve the diversity of their departments. Researching diversity and exploring ways to create greater employment opportunities for minorities is also significant because legally, and morally, providing equal opportunity is the right thing to do.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A review of available literature found that much has been written on the topic of diversity. The literature review found authors who believe that diversity within the workforce is a key to achieving quality service delivery because it is essential to establishing the link with the community and society in general terms. We do not serve a homogenous population and need a diverse perspective to achieve success in our delivery of service. Gender diversification is one way to broaden the agency perspective. A lack of diversity within an agency needs to be addressed. The gender diversity problem is defined in four ways; the lack of minorities in the fire service, the lack of minorities in leadership positions, the quality of the minority experience in the fire service, and the fire service culture (Walter, 1996).

In day to day interactions with the community, a fire department is strengthened and enjoys more community support when community members see themselves represented. The communities we serve and the taxpayers who support us are becoming more diverse, and a diverse workforce positions an organization for a competitive future (Paulsgrove, 1998).

In an article titled *Affirmative Action and Affirming Diversity*, Melinda Carlton, William Donahue, Bobby Garcia, Philip Hawkey, Dan Johnson and Douglas Watson



(1997) also recognize that a diverse workforce will reap benefits for the organization.

The organization will be positioned to come up with strategies to develop the full potential of employees, resulting in a more productive workforce. To appreciate that a diverse workplace is more competitive in a diverse marketplace, a shift of the organizational culture to respect differences and individuality will be necessary (Carlton, et al.).

A more practical reason for a diverse workforce and employee diversity training is alluded to in an article that appears in JEMS. “If doing the best for our patients is the guiding principle that emergency responders use to evaluate our actions, then how can we do what is best if we are ignorant about the culture of the people we are called upon to serve” (Honeycutt, 1997 p. 39)? She lists several ways in which the cultural ignorance of healthcare providers can affect patient care. Touching, eye contact, speaking to someone other than the senior family member, inappropriate hand gestures, addressing elderly patients by their first names, or simply offering medical care can lead to misunderstandings between healthcare providers and members of other cultures (Honeycutt).

Judith Moore (1996) agrees that cultural ignorance can lead to miscommunication. Different cultures have different nuances. Even the use of the same words, gestures, symbols, and behavior connotes different meanings, leaving plenty of room for uncertainty, misconceptions, and misinterpretation. Many times we argue that “deep down we are all alike when it comes right down to it.” But in fact, we both are and are not alike at the same time. Adaptation to the usual interviewing process involves learning what is normal in the context of the subject’s culture (Moore).

The Moore article (1996) says there is no substitute for direct experience with persons from different cultures when it comes to shaping perceptions and attitudes. An African-American who is positively identified with the Black community has the greatest chance for successfully forging alliances with the African-American community. This is also true of the Hispanic community. Moore writes about the Hispanic concept of “personalismo.” Personalismo is the prevalence among traditional Hispanics of dealing only with their own social group. Moore concludes that it will always be important to spend time with another culture before interacting with the members of the group in a professional capacity. The most important skill is building alliances within the culture (Moore).

Other authors believe that diversity should not be approached as a compromise of quality. Instead, talent should be selected and developed that allows the community to succeed while reflecting its diversity. Expanding workforce diversity brings with it improvements in skill levels and new insights and capabilities for delivery of services to the community. Diversity helps managers understand who their customers are, and the workforce should reflect those residents and community members (Carlton, et al., 1997).

A large part of the available literature deals with diversity issues for employers whose workforce already reflects current demographic trends. Cultural Diversity for Fire and Emergency Services Instructors, an instructor’s guidebook published by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) (1994) for the U.S. Fire Administration National Fire Academy, cites a Hudson Institute report for the Department of Labor, *Workforce 2000* (1987), outlining demographic trends for the 1990’s workforce. *Workforce 2000* asserted that the workforce would become more female and include

more people of color by the year 2000. Another report stated that white males would become a smaller percentage of new entrants into the workforce, while more women will enter until women account for more than 47 percent of the total workforce. It further stated that non-whites entry into the labor force would double to 29 percent of all new entries in the year 2000 (Johnston and Packer, 1987).

As a result of *Workforce 2000*, (1987) the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) sponsored a conference in Maryland in 1991, “FireForce 2000: Preparing the Fire Service for the Workforce of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” IAFC President Dave Hilton said, “The IAFC expects this restructuring to move at an even faster pace during the 1990s and, while some of these changes could be quite disruptive, at the same time many of these changes offer opportunities to strengthen the fire service” (Briese, 1991, p.14). The conference identified five specific recommendations for the fire service:

1. Developing and conducting human resource training programs on a regular basis and hiring a human resources manager for fire departments, if possible.
2. Developing orientation programs that emphasize cultural diversity and choosing benefits that reflect the diversity of the workforce.
3. Developing multi-lingual training programs for fire service personnel and multilingual public education literature.
4. Enhancing the organization’s code of ethics to reflect human resource (people) concerns and establishing policies for harassment.

5. Encouraging fire chiefs and management to develop a “tiered” entrance system to permit the development of new employees and facilitate the most qualified individuals for a given job (Briese, 1991).

A diversity consultant, Harris Sussman, does not believe the workforce will reflect the changing diversity of our society to the same degree as the trends listed in *Workforce 2000*. He states, “Since *Workforce 2000* came out, many managers have not seen this wave of change happen in the workforce and, therefore, disbelieve the diversity findings. The year 2000 is only seven years away and nothing much will change by then” (Sussman, 1992, p. 15). Sussman referred to a study done by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) in Washington, DC, titled *The Myth of the Coming Labor Shortage: Jobs, Skills, and Incomes in America’s Workforce 2000*, that does not suggest a workforce where white males are disappearing but continuing to dominate (Sussman, 1991).

An analysis of 1991 U.S. career fire service personnel from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that 98 percent of the fire service is male and 84 percent of the males are white. The FEMA guidebook believes that a proactive approach to diversity issues is the best route for the fire service. Regardless of when the inevitable changes occur, and rather than dwelling on statistics that shows the fire and emergency services have catching up to do, it is time to prepare for the future (Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], 1994).

In *A Handbook on Women in Firefighting*, authors Dee Armstrong, Brenda Berkman, Terese Floren, and Linda Willing (1993) provide statistics for women employed in the fire service, ideas for the recruitment and retention of female firefighters, and suggestions for fire department diversity training. The authors suggest that fire chiefs who fail to

successfully manage a diverse workforce will find that the workforce is managing them instead. To ignore diversity issues opens the door to friction, miscommunication, and a host of inequities that can lead to poor performance and a loss of teamwork. They go on to say that it is not enough to state that, "We'll hire anyone who meets our standards," without asking how those standards are set and can they be justified. What happens to someone who meets the standard but faces the barrier of hostile coworkers? What support systems are in place for minority employees? Simply having in place neutral policies that are applied equally to everyone does not necessarily create equal opportunity (Armstrong, et al.).

There were more than 3,000 women at work in fire suppression positions on 650-plus fire departments throughout the United States in 1992. Several sizeable departments were over or approaching a workforce of ten-percent women. An estimated eleven percent of women career firefighters are African-American, another four percent are Hispanic, one percent are Asian, Native American or other women of color, and 84 percent are Caucasian. Women in the fire service demonstrate at least as much diversity as men in terms of age, ethnicity, work history, and personal background (Armstrong, et al., 1993).

The handbook recommends that for successful recruitment and retention of female firefighters groundwork must be laid. The entire operation can be undermined from within the department. If other aspects of your department give a conflicting message about the department's commitment and preparation for the hiring of female firefighters, your recruitment efforts will be negated. The true measure of success of a recruitment

drive is not only in how many females apply, but also in how many are productive firefighters two or more years down the road (Armstrong, et al., 1993).

A checklist of basic steps for departments to take in order to make the recruitment and retention of women more successful would include an evaluation of application and testing procedures, policy and development review, recruit training, gear and facilities. The evaluation of testing procedures would include an examination of written and physical entry-level tests to insure they are accessible to women. Policies on sexual harassment, cultural diversity training, maternity leave, hair length, and personal grooming should be developed or reviewed for fairness. Does the training staff have a positive attitude toward training women? Have female firefighters who are interested in assisting, been detailed to assist the recruit instructors? Uniforms and fire gear should be available in women's cuts and sizes the first time it is needed. Fire stations should have adequate facilities for both sexes (Armstrong, et al., 1993).

Certain key elements will be present in any successful recruitment drive. These elements include:

- Management support
- Careful recruitment team selection
- Realistic schedule design
- Recruitment materials aimed at the target group
- Publicity within the community
- Effective use of media
- Orientation sessions and open houses (Armstrong, et al., 1993).

A Handbook on Women in Firefighting, contains a wealth of information on many areas affecting the integration of women into the fire service. The last of these areas covered in this report concerns diversity training. The authors surmise that offering diversity training is smart because it promotes fairness. Litigation as a result of discriminatory practices can be expensive. Beyond the cost of legal trouble, disharmony can be expensive in ways that are not easily given a dollar value: poor morale, employee turnover, and a discredited reputation in the community. Cultural diversity training is not only about avoiding litigation but also about managing change aggressively and progressively (Armstrong, et al., 1993).

What constitutes a good cultural diversity training program? A good program is given a budgetary priority so that an outside instructor with expertise and experience can be employed. The outside instructor can incorporate department members into the design and delivery of the program, then hand off subsequent training to them. All personnel should receive the training but education should start at the top with the chief and senior staff. Cultural diversity training should be followed up on a regular basis. Finally, training on cultural diversity issues should be incorporated into recruit training and promotional processes (Armstrong, et al., 1993).

Walter (1996) offers these possible solutions. Use new approaches in recruitment, including the use of existing women, special outreaches, and target audiences. Analyze officer qualifications to insure they are equitable and examine whether women are being encouraged to seek promotion. Insure there are adequate facilities and equipment for women. Departments should have clear written policies on pregnancy and operational responsibilities and on sexual harassment. Encourage gender neutral language in

departmental literature and policies. Increase the visibility of minority members (Walter).

The article also uses the Hudson Institute report on demographic trends to point out that a diverse workforce will become a reality for employers. More women will be on the job and one-third of all new employees will be a minority. A model for implementing a diversity plan developed by the city of Austin, Texas is cited in the article. The Austin plan recommends the following actions:

- Establish a compelling rationale
- Gather data
- Create a credible steering committee
- Develop a long-term plan
- Involve senior management
- Involve numerous employees

Customer service is used as the rationale for an organization to have a strong commitment to diversity training. External customer service is built internally, on the organization's employees. If the organization is having internal problems with its employees, those employees cannot maximize their service to the public (Albertson, 1997).

Simply having a diversity-training program may not be enough. U.S. companies spend an estimated \$100 million to \$300 million annually on diversity training, yet lawsuits filed by women and minorities rise annually. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) had 32,836 resolutions of sex-based discrimination charges in 1997, up from 18,817 in 1991. There were 36,419 resolutions in race-



discrimination suits in 1997, up from 28,914 in 1991. When the vice-president of the National Organization for Women (NOW), Elizabeth Toledo was asked to name a company that modeled diversity in 1996, she replied, “We haven’t yet named a merchant we celebrate” (Flynn, 1998 p. 28). What’s gone wrong when organizations are investing in diversity training, but the incidence of lawsuits are increasing and a prominent women’s rights group cannot name a single company to praise for its diversity (Flynn)?

Diversity programs may be counterproductive. When diversity programs simply translate a negative stereotype (women are too emotional), into a positive one (women are intuitive); or make generalizations about minority perspectives (Hispanics have a laid-back management style, African-Americans prefer interactions, women offer sympathy rather than solutions) and say that these different characteristics should be valued for their diversity, many women and minorities may even find the programs insulting (Flynn, 1998).

## **PROCEDURES**

The purpose of this project is to determine if changes made in the Washington Township Fire Department’s hiring and promotional processes have been effective in recruiting, retaining, and promoting minority firefighters. The research procedures began with a literature review at the Learning Resource Center at the National Emergency Training Center, Emmitsburg, Maryland. Additional literature research was conducted at the Indianapolis Public Library in Indianapolis, Indiana. The available literature was examined to find information related to the first and third research questions. Could examples of the benefits to organizations related to the diversity of their workforce be

found? If a diverse workforce was beneficial in assisting an organization in meeting its mission, how can the fire department improve diversity within its organization?

In addition to the literature review, 1990 United States census information for the populations of Washington Township and Marion County were reviewed. A comparison was made between the minority composition of the township and county and that of the fire department's workforce to determine if the minority make up of the department reflected that of the community it serves. The department's workforce demographics for 1999 were also compared to the demographics for 1992. These research steps were taken to answer the second research question. How successful had the hiring and promotional changes the department began implementing in 1992 been in improving the diversity of its workforce?

Documents were obtained from the Institute for Public Safety Personnel, Incorporated (IPSP). IPSP is the company contracted to administer the department's hiring and promotional processes. The documents outline the procedures for advertising the hiring of firefighters and the procedures followed during the hiring process. The advertising and procedures followed in 1992 were compared against those in place during the department's most recent hiring process conducted in 1996. As a member of the department's administration, the author of this research has firsthand knowledge of the hiring and promotional processes. To clarify questions concerning the changes implemented in the hiring process, an interview was held with Steve Bradley, Deputy Chief of Administration for the Washington Township Fire Department. Deputy Chief Bradley is the department coordinator who constructs and conducts the department's hiring and promotional operations with IPSP.

The research was limited both in the narrowness of its scope and the breadth of the subject matter. The study is limited in its scope in that it examines only the diversity of the workforce of the Washington Township Fire Department. The project would be stronger if other area departments had been surveyed to determine the demographics of their workforces as compared to their communities. These statistics could then be compared to national figures. The breadth of the subject matter limits the research because diversity encompasses many topics. While this research project examines matters of recruitment, hiring, retention, diversity training, female firefighters, and African-American firefighters, sufficient data exists to conduct in-depth research on any of those topics individually. The three research questions could be the subject of a research project in and of themselves.

## **RESULTS**

Does a diverse workforce enable the fire department to better meet its mission? Most of the literature agreed that the first research question could be answered affirmatively. The most stated reason was improved customer service. In order to serve a diverse community it is necessary to establish a link with the community. Workforce diversification is one way to broaden the agency perspective. Diversity does not require a compromise of quality; instead talented employees should be selected who successfully serve the community while reflecting its diversity. Employees who add to the variety of the labor force expand insights and capabilities for providing service to the public.

To establish rapport and effective communication an organization needs a diverse perspective. If we are ignorant about the culture of the people we serve, miscommunication can lead to misunderstandings that affect the quality of our

interactions with the community. Different cultures have different nuances. Words, symbols, gestures, and behavior can have different meanings. There is no substitute for direct experience with people from different cultures when it comes to relating to members of those cultures. The fire department will enjoy more community support and their daily interactions will be stronger if the community sees themselves represented. The taxpayers that support the fire service are becoming more diverse. To position itself for a competitive future, the fire department must employ people who reflect that diversity.

What were the changes made to the hiring and promotional processes since 1992? Have they proven to be effective in increasing the diversity of the department's workforce? Personnel figures from 1992 reveal that the department had 125 merit employees, 110 in line positions (assigned to fire apparatus), and 15 others in staff positions (administrative personnel). There were three African-American employees, one Hispanic, one Asian, and one female employee. Minorities represented 5 percent of the workforce; 2 percent were African-American. Women, Hispanics, and Asians each represented less than 1 percent of the workforce. White males held all of the staff positions. Minorities represented only 3 percent of all officer positions. Out of five captains, none were minorities and only one lieutenant out of 25 was a minority. The highest rank held by an African-American was corporal. Two of the 24 or 8 percent of corporal positions were held by minority firefighters.

The interview with Deputy Chief Bradley revealed that four significant changes were made to the hiring process. First, the department targeted media outlets whose demographics showed a wide minority clientele. The advertisement for applicants was

added to those outlets. Three radio stations and a community newspaper with a large African-American audience were added. The department's ad was also included in *Indianapolis Women's Magazine*. Second, hiring notifications were posted at locations where qualified minority applicants would be likely to see them. They included Indianapolis Black Expo, the Hispano-American Center, Ladies Only Health Spa, college placement offices, and area churches. Third, minority firefighters were added to the boards that assisted IPSP with the construction of the written and oral tests. Fourth, each of the oral interview boards included at least one minority firefighter. The third and fourth changes were also implemented for the promotional process, S.F. Bradley (personal communication, May 14, 1999).

Current personnel statistics show 134 merit personnel employed by the fire department. The department employs three African-Americans, three females, a Hispanic and an Asian. Minorities represent six percent of all employees; 2 percent are females, 2 percent are African-Americans, less than 1 percent are Hispanics, and less than 1 percent are Asians. White males hold all of the administrative positions and there is only one minority in an officer position. Three corporal positions are held by African-Americans. Each of the three female employees holds the rank of private.

According to United States census information from 1990, women comprise 52 percent of the population in Marion County, African-Americans 22 percent, Hispanics 1 percent, and Asians 1 percent. In Washington Township 53 percent of the population are females, 25 percent African-American, one percent Hispanic, and 1 percent Asian (United States Census Bureau, 1990).

Since 1992, 35 firefighters have been hired. There were 31 white males, three females, and one African-American. Four firefighters hired since 1992 have left the department. Three of them were white males and the other an African-American male. Eleven percent of new hires have been minority applicants. The total minority percentage of Washington Township firefighters has increased one percent. The percentage of female firefighters has grown by a little more than one percent, and the percentages of African-American, Hispanic, and Asian firefighters has remained the same.

The literature review found that most authors believe the national workforce will continue to become more diverse. Less white males will enter the workforce and the numbers of women and non-whites will increase. Some departments are reported to have as many as 10 percent female employees. The Bureau of Labor Statistics for 1991 showed that 16 percent of firefighters nationally were minorities. At least one author believes that the fire service does not reflect the diversity trend. In the case of the Washington Township Fire Department's workforce, white males continue to dominate.

What else can be done to improve upon the diversity of the fire department? The literature disclosed ideas for the recruitment and retention of minority firefighters.

According to the literature, a successful recruitment effort must do the following:

- Management must support the recruitment effort by allocating resources
- Prioritize funding and other department resources such as personnel and support staff for the recruitment effort
- Form a recruitment team that utilizes the department's interested minority employees

- Distribute recruitment materials aimed at the target group throughout the community by effectively using the media
- Employ orientations and open houses
- Have all written tests validated by an outside expert to insure they do not discriminate against minorities
- Validate physical testing procedures by setting the pass/fail point based on a random sampling of firefighters

Policy review and development is recommended to retain qualified minority firefighters. Implement anti-harassment policies and complaint procedures. Policies on hair length, maternity leave, and fire department marriages should also be put into effect. Finally, no one wants to work where they are not wanted or valued. Incorporate diversity training on all levels of the department. Diversity training promotes fairness. Ignoring diversity issues leads to friction and miscommunication and can result in the loss of qualified employees.

## **DISCUSSION**

There are three basic questions at the heart of this research project. Would a more diverse fire department workforce benefit the citizens of Washington Township? Have changes to the hiring process resulted in a more diverse workforce? What else can be done to improve the diversity of the department's personnel?

The literature suggests that improved customer service results when the workforce reflects the minority composition of the community. Minority employees bring to the organization insights and perspectives of the minority community that the organization would otherwise lack. In order for minority members of the public to trust and support

the department they must feel they are represented. Communication between the fire department and the community will improve if department members have direct experience with the culture of the community.

The Washington Township Fire Department workforce does not reflect the diversity of the community it serves. Although the community is more than 50 percent female, only 2 percent of Washington Township firefighters are female. African-Americans represent 25 percent of the township's population but only 2 percent of the department's employees. Unless aggressively recruited, it is unrealistic to expect that women would comprise 50 percent of the department's workforce. For reasons such as traditional perceptions of the skills required for firefighting and a predominate male culture in the fire service, there are not sufficient numbers of interested females. However, three female firefighters on a department of 134 do not provide adequate representation. African-American firefighters are also under-represented.

Employers by law must offer equal opportunity. The minority community suffers when they are not given the same opportunities for employment as the majority, but has the lack of minority representation in the department's workforce limited its ability to meet its mission in any measurable way? This is a difficult question to answer because the department does not track customer satisfaction in any quantifiable way. If customer service to the minority community suffers when the department's workforce does not equitably represent the community, then how do we measure minority dissatisfaction? An increase in customer complaints from minorities might be expected. Under utilization of departmental programs in public education or the smoke detector give-away program would indicate dissatisfaction. A decrease in minority attendance at department functions



such as our weekend safety festival, might be another. Or maybe the department is not filling some unknown minority need. The fact is, we do not know if the minority community is satisfied with the department's services or not. We will not know until we open a dialogue with the minority community. As indicated in the literature review, effective communication with the community is best accomplished when an organization's diversity reflects the diversity of the community. The lack of a diverse workforce in Washington Township has resulted in a lack of communication with our minority community. Because of this, we cannot be sure whether we are providing the kind of service, or even the types of service, needed by that community.

If a more diverse workforce would benefit the department and the minority community it serves by improving information flow, then how successful has the department been in increasing the number of minority firefighters? Despite implementing changes in the hiring and promotional processes in 1992, the number of minority firefighters has increased only slightly. Eleven percent of the firefighters hired since the beginning of 1992 have been minorities, but the overall increase has been slight, 5 percent to 6 percent. The number of African-American, Hispanic, and Asian firefighters has remained the same. The only increase has been in the number of female firefighters on the job. There are now three female firefighters as compared to one female firefighter in 1992. Clearly, the implemented changes did not have the desired effect.

There were two ways the department attempted to recruit more minority applicants; advertising in minority media outlets and placing hiring notifications in targeted locations where minority applicants would be likely to see them. Two other changes were made to

the evaluation procedures in an attempt to increase a minority applicant's chance of success. Minority firefighters assisted in the construction of the tests and participated on the interview boards. As a result of the recruitment effort, 16 percent of applicants since 1992 have been minorities, 11 percent have successfully completed the hiring process, and 11 percent of our new hires have been minorities. The changes made to the hiring process appear to have been more successful in improving the success of the minority candidates than in recruiting minority applicants.

If the department has been unsuccessful in hiring minority firefighters, then it has failed even more in promoting minority firefighters. The administrative officers who serve at the discretion of the Fire Chief are all white males. With the exception of an Asian male, all of the department's officers are white males. No female or African-American male has been promoted since 1991. The highest-ranking African-American is a corporal and the highest-ranking female is a private.

How can we do better? The literature contains several suggestions for improving minority recruitment. Management must support successful recruitment efforts by providing adequate resources. Staff support including a full-time Human Resources Director and allocation of sufficient financial support are two of the resources mentioned. The literature further recommends the creation of recruitment materials that target specific minorities; utilizing media outlets that have high minority visibility to distribute the materials to the minority community; orientations and open houses; and the formation of a recruitment team that uses the department's minority employees.

Fire Department management has committed resources to minority recruitment. IPSP was contracted to validate the hiring and promotional processes and to recommend

improvements for recruiting successful minority candidates. On duty personnel were permitted to participate in the construction of tests and to sit on interview boards. Minority media outlets were identified and utilized for the distribution of the department's employment advertisements.

The department does not have a full time Human Resource Director who is solely responsible for personnel issues. The Deputy Chief of Administration is responsible for the hiring and promotional processes but also has many other responsibilities. The department has not utilized its minority firefighters in a recruitment campaign, nor held open houses or orientation sessions for interested candidates. Implementing these recommendations could improve minority recruitment efforts.

Retaining minority firefighters is another area where the department could make a greater effort. Four of the firefighters hired after 1992 left the department. One of those firefighters is African-American. Prior to 1992, a female firefighter and two other African-American firefighters left the department. The female firefighter filed a sexual harassment lawsuit that was eventually settled out of court. One African-American washed out during his probationary year and the other was involved in litigation against the department concerning a disability claim. The department has taken steps to institutionalize sexual harassment policies and diversity training but, a thorough examination of the culture and working conditions of the department must be taken to insure that the department provides a working environment that is not hostile to its minority employees. This conforms to the opinions of authors cited in the literature review who believe that the true measure of any recruitment effort is the number of minority employees who remain on the job as productive workers. It does little good to

expend energy on recruiting minorities if they will encounter an atmosphere in which they will not continue working.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

A diverse workforce assists the fire department in meeting its mission by improving customer service provided to the minority community. The improved customer service is primarily the result of enhanced communications. The more effectively feedback is received from our minority customers the better we can respond to their needs. The Washington Township Fire Department's workforce lacks diversity. The workforce does not reflect the African-American population of the community and females are not adequately represented. There is anecdotal evidence that the Hispanic population in our community is expanding. When the 2000 census information is released we may find that the Hispanic community is under-represented as well.

Changes to the hiring and promotional processes implemented to recruit and hire additional minority firefighters have not significantly improved the diversity of the workforce. No improvement has been made in the promotion of minority firefighters. The inadequate minority representation in the department's workforce has restricted our interaction with our minority customers. Limited communication has resulted in a situation where the department is unsure whether the requirements of the minority community have been met or not.

At the request of a Township Board member the department has created a Diversity Task Force Committee. The committee members include an African-American Township Board member who serves as the chairman, the Township Trustee who is female, one female firefighter, and two African-American firefighters. Other committee

members, all of whom are white males, include the Chief, the Deputy Chief of Administration, the President of the firefighters union, and the Director of IPSP. This is a step in the right direction.

To be successful the committee should consider the following recommendations: A greater effort must be made to recruit qualified minority applicants. The minority members of the committee can provide valuable input on how best to accomplish this. Members of other fire departments and businesses who have successfully recruited minority applicants should be solicited for advice. Input should also be obtained on producing recruit literature specific to the minority community. Recruitment cannot rely only on pamphlets and advertisements. Recruiters need to make presentations to identified groups. When possible, the recruiters should be minority firefighters.

The committee has to conduct a policy and development review. Policies on sexual harassment and cultural diversity training in particular must become institutionalized in order to create a working environment where all of the department's members can be productive employees. Again, the department's minority firefighters should be consulted for input on creating a more favorable working climate.

The committee must also find ways to improve the department's minority promotional record. No minorities hold positions of authority within the department. This limits their ability to have a voice in the operational and strategic direction of the department. They are unable to effect positive change. Minority firefighters must be encouraged to participate in the promotional process. Mentoring programs are a possible solution. The promotional process takes time. In the short term, the Chief of the department should consider appointing minority firefighters to his staff. This would

serve the department in several ways. The appointment would add a diverse viewpoint to the administration that could provide additional insight into the community. Their presence would indicate that the opinions of the minority were valued, and minority staff members would provide the administration with another avenue for communication.

Hiring a fulltime Human Resource Director should also be considered. The director would be responsible for working with recruitment committees to implement the recommended changes to the hiring and promotional processes. The director would coordinate the development of literature and the distribution of the literature through the media. A Human Resource Director would also be responsible for reviewing existing policies on sexual harassment and diversity training to see if improvements can be made.

The Washington Township Fire Department's mission is to prevent or minimize the loss of life and property through education and intervention to the satisfaction of those we serve. Perhaps this statement should read, to the satisfaction of "all" we serve. To meet that mission a more diverse workforce is necessary. The department has committed to making this a reality but to date has not been successful. Resolving to accomplish these recommendations will allow the department to meet its goal.

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