

COLUMBUS BUSINESS FIRST

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What benefit does a diverse work force bring to a business or organization? Diversity imbues an organization with creativity that leads to innovation and opportunities to better serve different markets and customers. People with different experiences will contribute ideas and pose solutions that a homogeneous group cannot.

From your experience, what are the biggest challenges or threats to achieving diversity into the workplace? One of the biggest challenges is prejudice. If we don't defend and embrace differences, diversity won't happen because prejudice is a strong thing. Prejudice is comfort, and we have to get out of our comfort zones in order to be successful.

How is a diverse workplace important to employees? Diversity improves trust. It makes people stretch to understand and respect others. The minute someone takes time to know me, the more I'm going to do for them. For effective communication, collaboration and innovation to occur, employees must trust each other and their managers.

How is a diverse workplace important to customers, clients and business partners? Diversity is important to allow us to serve Franklin County's diverse population. For the Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority, supporting diversity is critical because we focus on special-needs populations, including older adults, veterans and those who are homeless. Without diversity in our workplace we could not effectively interact with different demographics and serve the community as well as we do. Our board supports diversity not only in the workplace but also in contracting and in collaboration with a broad range of community partners.

How do you help employees or customers overcome fears they may have about diversity in your company or organization? We tackle fears head-on and address them. Fear usually comes from lack of understanding of the importance of diversity, so we continually educate our employees that diversity makes their teams and our organization better. We encourage everyone to take the time to get to know each other. If I respect someone's differences and he respects mine, that allows us to come together over what we have in common, not what divides us. In business as in life, we should not focus on what's different, but what we share, and that's love for mankind.

Grade the Central Ohio business community for its efforts toward promoting and encouraging diversity in the workplace. I give it an A. I'm blessed to live in a city that is comfortable, open and honest about embracing those who are different versus marginalizing people. The fact that *Business First* even created this award speaks volumes.



**OUTSTANDING DIVERSITY
ROLE MODEL**