

## **MANAGEMENT IS NOT ALL BLACK OR WHITE**

(Or, Possible pitfalls of positive discrimination)

"..... all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

**(Declaration of the Representatives of the 13 States of the USA on 4 July 1776)**

The world, nations, societies, organizations and companies are full of one form of discrimination or another and I suggest, whether we like it or not or even accept it or not, that it is human nature to actually prefer to meet, eat, discuss, learn, work and even socialize with people of our own background, culture, creed, customs and traditions based on more than a degree of commonality.

But that does not mean that we would not socialize, play sport with or work with people from other nationalities and religious beliefs from around the world. Indeed, for any notion of globalization and global trade as well as global sporting events, to continue we must make every effort to begin to understand one another whilst acknowledging national differences, cultural habits, customs, religions and traditions, dietary preferences and political leanings as part of the process of communicating and learning from one another.

The concept, the notion, that we are all not only created equal, something that could be discussed without resolution 'ad infinitum', but that we are all entitled to access to equal education, equal opportunity of further and higher education and an equality of access to employment opportunities might be laudable but it borders on being Utopian for no other reason than the amount of monies made available for education and for the provision of education facilities and purposes in developed, yet alone developing countries, varies enormously and is unlikely to reduce. It is the continuing gap between the rich and poor that, somehow, perpetuates the political, economic, social and professional divide. As Aldous Huxley suggested,

"That all men are equal is a proposition which, at ordinary times, no sane individual has ever given his assent. "

**(Aldous Huxley (1894 - 1963), English novelist and critic)**

Affirmative action, sometimes referred to as positive discrimination, is a confused system of selection for employment, used in some countries, companies and organizations, based on a so-called policy of equity which is, more often than not, determined by the percentage ethnic mix of a society in an effort to achieve what is called equity and equality of access. The process of achieving a degree of equity is difficult, often fraught, and progress can only be achieved by complete openness and integrity with candidates and the question when does affirmative action translate into racial discrimination must always be addressed.

Those in favour of such policies more often than not defend the process of selection based on ethnicity, sometimes on gender or age, even when statistics might indicate there is a skills shortage among some of the ethnic, gender or age groupings and the result could, sometimes, be disastrous for the overall effectiveness and efficiency of an organization

In the first instance it is a fact, sad or otherwise, that we are not all created equal, that we are not all born with equal access to help and support in our formative years, that we do not all have equal access to, and equality of, education based on a form of standardized education programme and system; we do not all learn at the same pace in every subject; we do not all have equal access to further and higher education nor equal access to aids to education such as desktop and laptop computers; and, therefore, we do not all have equality of access to employment opportunities and we are not all capable of accepting responsibility and accountability and managing the most important asset – people.

Positive discrimination is an emotive subject that, perhaps, has some merit but when it comes to business, industry and commerce, and sporting achievement it is important to ensure that you recruit or select the best person or persons to carry out a specific task or tasks and any notion of such discrimination should not enter the equation. The primary objective of any organization is to remain in business through the combined efforts of the people who make up the team, section, group or division and for those people to be able to work together based on their individual commitment and overriding ability to supporting that same group of people to achieve short and longer-term tactics.

The idea that it makes sound business or commercial sense to interview, recruit, select and appoint people for employment positions and management opportunities based on, for example, race, colour, creed or religion and that all promotion within an organization should follow the same pattern, does not make a great deal of sense.

Do companies and organizations actually set quotas to determine who they can or will recruit and promote and how on earth do they reach those conclusions and the selection process and why on earth do they make those decisions?

A commercial company has a duty of care firstly to its shareholders and secondly to its suppliers and employees to ensure that its recruitment and selection programme is based not on a process of affirmative action but on finding the most suitable candidate and their general knowledge, previous experience and on their professional, vocational and academic qualifications for a position regardless of race, gender and age. Indeed, not to do so indicates more than a degree of incompetence on the part of the personnel department and those managers responsible for recruitment and selection.

If and when a government department or public body chooses to employ a policy of affirmative action or positive discrimination they have a duty of care to the country and to the electorate to ensure that any and all selection programmes are based on background knowledge and ability and not ethnicity. If they are based on ethnicity then the percentage quota programme should be more strictly adhered to in order to avoid the very real possibility of becoming increasingly discriminatory. And, when quota programmes are applied it is paramount that regular investigations into the effectiveness of such affirmative action programmes are conducted to ensure that government or a public body is best served by its employees.

The implementation of change is, allegedly and according to some commentators and writers, part of the process of progress even though change does not always, some might say often, bring any actual improvement or show any real progress. So, whilst affirmative action may improve the lot of one section of society it must, simply by action and by definition, disadvantage other groupings, by age, gender or ethnicity, in that society.

And, there are increasing examples where political correctness coupled with affirmative action or positive discrimination programmes is leading to gross political and managerial incompetence and even to the failure of companies and countries. Therefore, government should not seek to interfere by imposing change throughout society and most certainly not interfere with the practices and procedures employed in commercial companies and organizations for the fundamental reason that they place the political, economic and technological progress of a nation in jeopardy.

At the end of the recent World Rugby Cup final, between the England and the South African, Springbok, rugby teams in France, voices were suddenly raised in the media suggesting that the South African rugby team was either unrepresentative or was not representative of the peoples of that nation, that it must change and that in future it must have players based on quotas of the ethnic representation of the country. Indeed, successive discussions in the media, certainly in Britain, have indicated that there is more than a degree of frustration within many sections of South Africa with more strident voices suggesting that it is long since time that more black players were selected for the national side.

The immediate question has to be why? Why should the members of any sporting team be selected based on their ethnicity, and if that was to be the case they how does one deal with the fact that a great many athletes in, for example, the United States and the United Kingdom, are black and should they be replaced based on ethnic quotas? Why should the directors and senior management team within a company or an organization or why should the workforce of a company be made up of quotas based on ethnic background and origin?

In the first instance, that is something for the rugby players, the coaches and the rugby selection committee of South Africa to decide and to respond to the question whether it is more important to have a politically correct approach to selection based on quota representation or whether it is more important to select a team, and team is the most important word here, that can train together, work together and function and operate to win in future contests.

Surely, if common sense is to be applied, directors, managers, coaches and even politicians, in industry and commerce and in sport, should always, if they hope to succeed, select, for example, the brightest, strongest, quickest or most capable people for the task in hand without showing any form of nepotism or pandering to political interference that should have not place in business and sport?

If you hope to win in any game of life, in business, sport and politics, then does it not make sense that knowledge, ability, skills, merit, previous experience and such things as professional and vocational qualifications enter the equation and not such crass ideas based on affirmative action and selection according to ethnic background or skin colour? Or has the world, perhaps some politicians, organizations and companies, gone mad in pursuing affirmative action programmes based on positive discrimination in turn based on ethnic mix?

I believe this is a subject that will not go away and is likely to lead to future discussions as the business and economic world becomes increasingly global.

(1730 words)

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