

Why Creating Diversity in the Workplace is Worth the Effort

PAYCHEX
Business Series

Coronavirus



Gene Marks

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Sarah Morgan

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Full transcript

Gene Marks:

Hey everybody. I'm your host, Gene Marks, and this is season two of the Paychex Business Series podcast. I am a certified public accountant, regular business columnist for a bunch of publications you may know, like The Guardian, The Washington Times, The Philadelphia Inquirer, Forbes, and Entrepreneur, oh, and The Hill. But most importantly, I'm a small business owner of a financial and technology management services company. I've teamed up with Paychex, the leading provider of human resources, payroll, benefits, and insurance services, to bring you real life stories and advice from real life business owners and experts.

Gene Marks:

Now last season, we talked about the challenges associated with COVID. A lot of those challenges haven't gone away, unfortunately. But this season, we're focusing on moving forward and innovating and navigating the road to full recovery. I'm really excited today to bring on my special guest, Sarah Morgan. Sarah is the founder and chief excellence officer of BuzzARooney, LLC. Sarah, thanks for joining us. I'm really glad. First of all, what is BuzzARooney LLC?

Sarah Morgan:

So I work with small businesses and startups on creating inclusive workplace culture, so that's what I do as the CEO of BuzzARooney LLC. The company is actually named for my childhood nickname that was given to me by my father. I was a nosy little kid who buzzed around and touched everything, and asked all the questions. And so when I decided to put my business into an LLC and name it officially, I wanted to both honor him and honor my curious three year old self that touched all the things and asked all the questions because that's a large part of what I do in consulting, is asking those inconvenient questions and digging down into the real weeds and details of what's happening as we try to create more inclusive workplaces. And so I wanted to just make sure to consistently remind myself to be that curious kid all over again.

Gene Marks:

Very cool. So Sarah, so look, my business, I have about 600 small- and medium-sized clients for my firm, and they're mostly in the Philadelphia area. That's where I'm out of. You know?

Sarah Morgan:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Gene Marks:

And they're honestly, and I've been working with these people for 20 plus years, the average age and demographic of the U.S. small business owner is a 52 year old white man. And when I go around to my clients, that demographic plays itself out all the time. These are people running family owned businesses, distributors, manufacturers, industrial parks, and office complexes, all around that. You walk in their offices and they have 10, 20, even 80 employees, and honestly, next to zero diversification. And I'm sure you've seen that before. What do you do when you ... What are your thoughts on that, for starters?

Sarah Morgan:

My hope is that all organizations will seek to make sure that their organization represents the community that you live in and the clients that you're seeking to service. And so particularly when you're talking about metropolitan cities, a Philadelphia, a Raleigh, North Carolina, where I am, you have a ton of diversity in terms of the people who live there.

Gene Marks:

Sure, of course.

Sarah Morgan:

And so the hope would be that you would seek some of that talent pool in hiring for your own organization. But I know that with small businesses, what happens, we tend to make our first hires based on people we know and trust. And then we tend to hire based on referral as we move out from there. And so because it's unusual for people to have a large amount of diversity in their personal circles, when you start to hire referrals, you tend to get more of the same types of people. And then you look up, and your organization isn't reflective of the community that it lives in and the community that it services.

Sarah Morgan:

And so once you realize that as an organization, you just kind of have to take a step back and decide what you want to do about that. For some organizations, the answer is nothing. The answer is that we're satisfied with how we're performing. We recognize that our organization is lacking in diversity, but it's not an intentional exclusion of anyone, and so we're going to continue on as we've been doing. I don't recommend that, but I recognize that it's a way of thinking that is definitely out there.

Sarah Morgan:

And for others, it becomes we're not comfortable with this, and so then you have to be more intentional about diversifying where you recruit from and diversifying the slate of candidates that you consider when you have a role that's open, and start to intentionally bring more diversity into your organization. And recognize that doesn't mean that you're going to sacrifice quality of the individual. That's probably one of the most cringey statements that I hear people make when it comes to hiring with diversity in mind, is, "I don't want to hire someone that's unqualified." Well, who would ever do that? Why does that even become a consideration? If you flip that statement around, you would never say, "I don't want to hire some unqualified white guy."

Gene Marks:

Right, of course.

Sarah Morgan:

You just assume that the people that you're going to hire are going to be qualified for the role, or that they have a character about them that allows them to be trainable. And so you can take that same mentality and apply it to a candidate from a marginalized identity, whether that's a woman, or whether that's a person of color.

Gene Marks:

It's tough. About a month or so ago, a CEO of a large bank, and I know you know this story, created a lot of controversy because he said in a Zoom meeting that his bank was having trouble reaching their diversity goals because there just wasn't enough qualified minority talent. You know?

Sarah Morgan:

Yeah. Yeah.

Gene Marks:

What are your thoughts on that?

Sarah Morgan:

My thoughts when I hear organizations make statements like that is that you're not trying hard enough because candidates with marginalized identities, diverse candidates, whatever it is that you choose to call them, are not hiding. They're in your ATS, but there is usually something either within your ATS and how you set up your screeners that are screening those individuals out, or your recruiting team who looks at your candidates are not properly trained and conditioned in how to identify your candidates that are from those communities. Or you're not recruiting in the places where those communities tend to look for jobs, and so that is the reason why you're not finding them. But it's not an issue of there being not enough talent or not enough qualified talent. It is 99% of the time not looking in the right places, not utilizing the tools that are available to you properly, to find those individuals.

Sarah Morgan:

And we would never ... And again, going back to what I said before, we would never use that same excuse on the flip side. We would never use the excuse that we can't do a marketing campaign because we can't find ... The target market just isn't there. We would continue to seek ways to reach that target market. We would continue to look at creative solutions to talk to, to reach the community that we're trying to reach. If we were trying to bring in clients from a specific demographic or a specific industry, we would look for ways to target our efforts to reach those individuals to bring them into our funnel. But yet, when it comes to recruiting candidates of color, women, so forth, we just say, "Oh, we can't find them. We give up."

Sarah Morgan:

And we have to just take the same energy, the same effort that we put towards doing those things and use it to think creatively about how we reach those communities. And if we can't come up with ideas, then we reach out to our network, and we ask them for help and guidance on how to do that. Google is still a thing, and you can still search for how to create that. There are articles and information abound, good articles and information abound on the internet that will tell you how to get started, or how to overcome, if you feel like you're struggling. So it's not that you just shrug your shoulders and give up. It's that you change your approach if this is something that's really important to you. And if it's not, then you give up. We all do better in environments that are diverse.

Sarah Morgan:

To me, there are five areas where we can really have an impact on breaking down barriers between communities and creating a greater sense of camaraderie and culture and understanding across different groups. And the workplace is definitely one of them, along with churches and the media and schools being the others. But the workplace is definitely one of them. And for so long, we have taken this approach that people just check their bias, check their racism, their sexism, all their phobias surrounding people and the ways that they live their life at the door, that we don't actively try to sufficient, often enough, try to promote appreciation of culture and try to get people to understand that. And there is data about on how much it benefits your organization to be diverse, not only in the employees that work there, but then also the demographic of business that you partner with and the type of customer that you have. And when organizations are more diverse, the employees have higher engagement. The employees have higher satisfaction. The employees have higher retention. The organizations are more profitable.

Sarah Morgan:

I mean, this is not just some kumbaya thought process of why it is that we should do this. The fact is that the organizations who are focused on diversity, and alongside that, equity and inclusion, are far and away more successful than the organizations that are not. If that is not enough of a reason to get people to get on this train and ride it until the wheels fall off, I really don't know what else we can say about it.

Gene Marks:

Do you think that ... First of all, what I'm hearing from you is that companies, and correct me if I'm wrong, companies are in many cases being lazy about their diversification. They're not trying hard enough to find the right people. And I don't seem to be educated enough to understand the benefits of diversification. And in fact, frankly, some of the companies that I work with, I know their diversification efforts are more PR motivated than actually trying to improve their business. But let me flip the coin. What about people in the black community and the Latino community? Do you think that those community members themselves could be doing more to go after those jobs and those opportunities to make people and companies, both big and small, aware of the benefits of diversification? My wife, she teaches at a private school. And there's a percentage of black kids that go to that school, and they have parents that were just over and above aggressively seeking out scholarships and ways to get their kids into that school because they knew it's a better school than their public neighborhood school. Do you know what I mean?

Sarah Morgan:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Gene Marks:

So they took it upon themselves to do that. And I wonder if there is some responsibility, if there's more that communities can be doing to help their members get jobs in companies, and to help companies themselves realize the benefits of diversification.

Sarah Morgan:

I think that all those efforts are already in existence. If an organization posts a job, and says that the way for you to be successful in getting this job is to apply through the ATS system, and you do that, and then you end up getting screened out, or you end up getting just pushed to the side in favor of a referral, who may not have followed the same process, then I don't really know what more it is that you could have done in that instance.

Sarah Morgan:

When you look at particularly black women, we are worldwide the most educated group of individuals on the planet. And yet, we continue to be underrepresented in organizations, underrepresented in management, directors, C-suite executive level, board level, within the org. So we're doing all of the things, we're getting the education, we're building the network. We're, in a lot of cases, at least I can say from the people that I communicate with on a regular basis, reaching out through the LinkedIn and so forth to try to express our interest, and yet still getting looked over.

Sarah Morgan:

For me, I am growing increasingly uncomfortable with the idea that it is the responsibility of the marginalized individual to remove themselves from the margin. I didn't put myself here. So how then does it become my responsibility solely, or my responsibility primarily, to remove myself from a place I didn't put myself? The playing field is not level, and we all recognize that. And so those of us who set the playing field within our respective organizations, that's where the greater burden lies to make sure that we're doing the things to create the opportunities and to make sure that there's equitable access and opportunity within those opportunities for everyone to have a chance to come along.

Sarah Morgan:

And I'm not sure that we are, those of us in corporate positions, in recruiting roles, and so forth, small business, medium sized business, large business, what have you, are doing our part to make sure that those of us who have been marginalized are being given equal access, equal opportunity to come out of those margins when we do the thing that we are supposed to do to bring ourselves out of those positions. And that's what there continues to be this push for mandates and things like that, which I know make people very uncomfortable.

Sarah Morgan:

But unfortunately, in our country, in America in particular, we have found that organizations on their own don't move very fast in making these kinds of changes when there's not mandate and there's not penalty for it. And that's unfortunate, but that's just been the history of we've done. We still would have kids working in factories if we hadn't put mandates in place because nobody was going to stop us from doing that because it was profitable for the organizations at the time to work that way. We would still have people working 60 hours a week with no overtime if we were left to our own devices. And so this issue of diversity, equity, inclusion, I think comes alongside our traditional, what we see as the traditional labor movement. And I think it becomes kind of that modern piece of that.

Gene Marks:

You used the example of workers and all that. Even more relevant example, just there was the 1957 Civil Rights Act, which gave black people the right to vote down South, and it didn't have any teeth in it. And it wasn't until the '64 Civil Rights Act that really put forth federal backing and regulations behind it, where counties and states, particularly down South, realized that we have to do this. So that's what gave way more the ability of black people to be able to vote. Okay, so you've convinced. I mean, there certainly is advantages to having a diverse workforce. It is something that we should be trying to do more. The government itself should be doing some mandates to kind of push us into doing what you know is the right thing to do.

Gene Marks:

So let's, as I kind of wrap this up though, I mean, and take your time now. Let's be really specific. So let's assume that you are running ... I have a client in suburban Philadelphia. I mean, not in the city, but very close to the city, about 100 employees. Other than a bunch of Hispanic and Latino workers in their factory, who are all family members, they all know each other in the same community, so they give each other ... They recommend jobs back and forth to each other. I mean, not a single black person in the company. So if you were going to advise these guys, say they said, "All right. We do have an interest in it. We do want to increase diversity. We do get it," what would you tell them to do? And this applies ... I'm using Philly as the example, but I'm sure, and it's the same in Raleigh. It's the same in any big city. What should they do?

Sarah Morgan:

Start with partnering with, whether it be colleges, alumni networks, that with the historically black colleges and universities, if diversity with black people is what it is that you're looking for, you know that you're going to find that there. And specifically posting your jobs there, and seeking to hire alumni of those universities. You can also, I know the NAACP and the ... Oh, the name of the other organization, Urban League. The Urban League both have job boards, where you can post positions to, again, to get to the candidates that you are trying to reach. When you're dealing with referrals, it's very easy. People are going to refer their friends and their family. And most of the time, those individuals look like them.

Sarah Morgan:

But when you're trying to find someone that you don't already have, you have to make a conscious effort to go into those communities and the places where those individuals tend to be looking for work, and look for them. So start by instead of just posting in your normal places where you may post open positions, or accepting referrals in open positions, say, "No, this is absolutely going to be an outside candidate." And we're going to be posting, in addition to the normal places that we post our jobs, we're also going to be posting in these additional two or three cases in order to ensure that we diversify the slate of individuals who come to us.

Sarah Morgan:

And then once that happens, as you begin to go through and screen resumes, the same way that you would give priority to a referral candidate in terms of who gets interviewed and so forth, those places where you've spent extra dollars because some of those do have paid ... If you pay for an ad with the NAACP, or you paid for an ad, if you're in Philly, you've paid for an ad with Cheyney or a Delaware State, or some other nearby HBCU that likely has alumni and students in your area, then those people are going to get the priority because you've invested more in obtaining these candidates. And so you're looking at those individuals, and then comparing that to others and giving some priority to that in terms of the folks that you bring in to have them interview.

Sarah Morgan:

If it's possible, because again, it can be difficult when you don't have diversity already, but if it's possible, add some diversity to the number of people who are doing the interviews, so that you're not just allowing one single hiring manager, who is accustomed to hiring from referrals, or hiring their own friends and family. Don't give them the sole power to make that kind of decision. You might want to put a panel or a committee of individuals together so that you can have multiple voices and buy in, into hiring for that role. And then from there, you follow your normal interview and assessment process and extend your offer.

Sarah Morgan:

And it's possible that at the end of all of that, the person that you select, that you feel is going to be the ultimate fit for your organization, or the ultimate enhancement to the culture that you have already developed, is not going to be a candidate of color. And that's okay, but at least you've made the effort to try to see what else is out there and what else is possible. And you've set the intention to follow through on that in making sure that you're considering all the options. And just continue to do that until you find your way.

Gene Marks:

Sarah, why did you cry during the Fresh Prince reunion?

Sarah Morgan:

I was a big fan of the show in its original. I watched the reruns over and over again with my family. And there were a few reasons. So first of all, how sweet was it that this group of people ... There's so many shows that you watch where the actors behind the scenes didn't really have love and care for one another. So to see this group of individuals come together after 30 years, and that they still were genuinely happy to see each other, genuinely happy to be around each other, really had care and fondness for one another, was just so nice to see when again, in a lot of shows that you watch, there's so much. You find out later on that behind the scenes, these two actors hated each other, so that was great.

Sarah Morgan:

And having been a fan of the show, I knew about the first Aunt Viv, second Aunt Viv, and the drama surrounding the exit of Janet Hubert Whitten when she left the show, and the difficulties ongoing between her and Will Smith for years. I've watched the videos and stuff, and so to watch the two of them just take full accountability with each other for the ways in which they misunderstood each other and had caused hurt and harm to one another over the years, and to just apologize and make peace was just so beautiful. I was so, so touched because we all have coworkers who we don't get along with and who we probably wouldn't spit on them if they were on fire.

Sarah Morgan:

But when years go by, and you get a little bit more age, and you get a little bit more perspective, you come to understand that this person was probably hurting, and I didn't do enough to support them. And how often in our lives do we take the opportunity or create the opportunity to make that right? And so to see those two people do that, and then to have that opportunity where she comes back and she's able to be together with the whole cast, to meet the person who took her job essentially, and to show complete love and respect to each other that way was just so beautiful to me.

Sarah Morgan:

And then lastly, the James Avery tribute. I mean, Uncle Phil was like everybody's uncle. And so just watching them talk about him and knowing that not only was he like that dad, uncle figure to all of us who watched the show, but he was equally that to them as young actors coming up. Because again, how many of us go into our workplaces with that elder statesman person who was super curmudgeonly, won't share any wisdom with you? And this guy was the complete opposite of that. And so just to watch them talk about how much he gave and poured into them, knowing that he's not here anymore. The whole thing was just so beautiful, so yeah, I cried snot bubble tears, it was a whole thing.

Gene Marks:

Only you could come up with an HR angle to the reunion of The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air.

Sarah Morgan:

Yeah. For sure.

Gene Marks:

Sarah Morgan is founder and chief excellence officer of BuzzARooney LLC. Sarah's website is buzzaroooneyllc.com. That B-U-Z-Z-A-R-O-O-N-E-Y-L-L-C.com. And you can follow her on Twitter at The Buzz on HR. Sarah, thank you so much for coming on. I have a bunch more questions for you as well, so I'd love to bring you back at some point.

Sarah Morgan:

For sure, for sure. Thank you. This was great.

Gene Marks:

Thank you. For more great episodes from The Paychex Business Series Podcast and other information to help you run your business, please visit paychex.com/worx. That's W-O-R-X. I'm Gene Marks. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you again soon.

Speaker 3:

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