



Georgia Power's *Affinity* *for* Diversity

By Richard Hutton

Look no further than Georgia Power to see how a diverse and inclusive workforce contributes significantly to a company's overall success. In 2011, the Southern Company subsidiary began focusing on the formation and implementation of 33 initiatives to begin changing the company's culture — the creation of affinity groups being one of them. These are non-exclusionary, grassroots groups formed by employees around a common characteristic outside of politics or religion. Once conceptualized, a business case is developed and submitted for approval to the Affinity Group Review Board. The company currently has seven active affinity groups and 28 percent of the more than 2,400-employee workforce is involved in them.



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The African-American Women's Networking Group has 300 members and is the second oldest affinity group at the company. "The formal mission of the group is to recruit, retain and develop African-American women," explains Latacia Adjei, 2009 president of the group and current advisor. Our success can be attributed to the focus of the group because we ensure that African-American women understand the culture of the company and successfully navigate it while being assets of our resourceful peers in the industry."

In terms of resources and managerial backing, "We provide groups with the same support that we would any other business function, we help develop facilitator skills and strategic plans for the organization," shares Frank McCloskey, vice president, Diversity.

"Over the next year, we are bringing in outside consultants to help develop a three-year strategic plan to understand what these groups want to accomplish, how they define success, and what activities they want to put together," he continues. We want to use affinity groups as a retention tool, and an invitation for others to work for us."

"Developing a three-year strategic plan has been an achievement," adds African-American Women's Affinity Group member Michelle Dean, who helps coordinate all seven affinity groups as Diversity Action project manager. "It ties in very closely to our business, it has a development aspect as well as a recruitment aspect, and just hones in on what we are doing to actually retain African-American female employees."

"We know what our objectives are, what is the desired outcome and how we would measure success in each of those areas," points out Adjei. "If our objective is creating synergy with leadership that facilitates the realization of a trusting and inclusive work environment, our desired outcome could be to support and nurture African-American women about their unique voice, ultimately enhancing the employee-manager relationship. So, the related metric would be increased participation of managers and employees outside of the membership."

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According to McCloskey, affinity groups have proven successful for Georgia Power. "During the last 10 years, our workforce has climbed 21 percent. Our non-white workforce has increased 10 percent, and our female workforce has increased 8 percent. Our overall representation today for non-whites is 27 percent, for women is 23 percent. For management level seven and above, our non-white representation is 17 percent, our female representation is 20 percent."

For officers of the company, the non-white population is 18 percent, the female population is 21 percent and the board of directors is 27 percent.

"Is that perfect racial and gender representation? No, but it's a snapshot in time," impresses McCloskey. "Our affinity groups are helping us develop the pipeline so we not only maintain but we build upon our representation, which is the key to our future success."

"Being a member of my affinity group has given me a greater opportunity to develop my leadership skills, because having served as president, you are leading a group of people where the positional authority is not there, so these are volunteer jobs," explains Adjei. "You have your daily work that you are held accountable for but you have to also motivate and inspire people to continue to contribute."

In his 10 years of orchestrating the diversity and inclusion efforts at Georgia Power, McCloskey has seen the company's perception change. "If a company is not serious about tapping into every available source of talent, they are not going to be successful," he says. "Our affinity groups are seen as a vital tool toward the success of Georgia Power today and in the future. We are only now beginning to tap into the benefit of what those groups can do. The best part is yet to come." ■