

Extreme Diversity Makeover Opportunity For Corporate America by M. Sandi Aigoro

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AMERICA, A NATION which formerly embraced a master/slave mentality, has embarked upon a new frontier of equality. Our newly elected President has lifted expectations and renewed hope as America's example to the world community. The 2008 election brings to view and acceptance by a majority of Americans, the notion that it is okay to be diverse. Electing the son of a white mother and African father, who was raised by a white grandmother and grandfather and married to a descendent of slavery is a profound statement by the American people. His ascension to the office of the President of the United States presents a litany of opportunities for examination by white men and women, single parents and working poor, Africans, African-Americans, immigrants to the United States and the international community. White male and female executives most certainly are able to take pride in their identity with the President. The fact that he was a child of a white mother and black father is not the entire picture. After the death of his mother, a single parent, the President-Elect was raised by his maternal grandparents, who were white.

President Obama's values were shaped in the struggle of his own identity as a biracial individual, which impacted how he interfaced with other races. This is also the case to some degree with many companies that are trying to manage diverse workforces and issues regarding discrimination. The President was able to extract values, ideologies, beliefs and lifestyle from his grandparents, which could be translated into motivation and reference points for his success. Some of these references could be considered for corporations to emulate. For example, as a biracial child, he learned the misperception that whites do not experience the devastation of poverty as single parents. As a child he experienced the hopelessness and helplessness of watching his single mother struggle to make ends meet while hoping for the best education and outcome for her children. He saw how poverty negatively impacted them, like poor minorities, with economic and social stratification that punishes less successful families.

It is evident by President Obama's success with diversity in his marriage, family, education and politics that he learned key lessons from his experience. Companies now have an opportunity to re-engineer how employees are evaluated in the hiring and employment phases. Without Affirmative Action, an individual like the President-Elect could have easily been missed. It would be a good idea for educators, family law practitioners, Human Resource professionals, and company executives to study the President's path to success to find key reasons why he was able to succeed against the odds. It is also valuable for African-Americans and immigrants to study the basis for success of individuals like Nelson Mandela, Jimmy Carter, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other diversity activists recently acknowledged in our society. By removing judgment and a need for restitution, whites in America might begin to release their guilt and move voluntar-

ily toward a more even playing field—similar to the change in discriminatory attitudes directed toward Jewish and Japanese members resulting from pre- and post-WWII social backlash.

Referencing the recent results of the election, white Americans will continue to realize the benefits of embracing good values and leaders regardless of their origins based on sex, race or nationality. The election of a new diverse president presents America with a great opportunity to make significant strides to resolve and heal from the past. White men and women, Africans, African-Americans, immigrants to the United States and the international community are watching corporate America along with political America to see if the progress with diversity ends up an everyday corporate and societal experience.



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