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My View

My View: Workplace diversity is now more important than ever

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Catching up on my reading, I came upon [Robert Backie's](#) recent viewpoint on diversity and inclusion in tech.

The author lessens the importance of diversity and inclusion (D&I) business programs, insists we forget the many "*isms*" that exist in life and business, downplays the value of mentors one can relate with culturally, and attacks hiring with an open mind toward diversity.

Let me share a better approach based on how a business ultimately succeeds:

The author insists we eliminate business programs that focus on race, gender or sexual orientation. The Arizona Million Dollar Circle of Excellence was formed to understand the benefits of D&I. They report that women- and minority-owned business contracts in this one program alone support more than 9,200 jobs,



Eric Diaz is the CFO of OYE! Business Intelligence and the founder of Coworking on 15th Ave

\$1 billion in economic activity, \$416 million in employee wages and \$34 million in tax revenue.

What we should do is promote business programs that exist to celebrate diversity, especially in tech. These groups offer strength as members find commonalities with others that come from similar places, speak similar languages and have experiences they can share and grow from. Thus, it is a matter of a business better understanding the market's dynamics. This has value in every industry in every country across the globe.

The author warns against D&I initiatives in hiring. He fails to note the purpose of D&I is to level the playing field by teaching individuals that unconscious bias leads to a lack of diversity. Hundreds of examples exist, but focusing on D&I has benefited one of the nation's largest commercial builders, Mortenson, which is involved in many high-profile construction projects in Phoenix, including Salt River Fields.

What we should do is rethink our hiring processes. Think about who may be the best person for the team, rather than just for one specific role. This is a matter of better educating those that do the hiring as opposed to forced hiring practices.

The author attaches little importance to finding mentors one can relate with culturally. One of the D&I groups the author would disband is ASU's 'Advancing Women in Construction,' which has the initiative to increase the number of women obtaining degrees in construction. This organization's mentorship program benefits mentees as they are able to gain insights from female members of the construction community who have experienced biases in their work history.

We should encourage young people to find mentors that can share guidance on how they succeed having come from difficult backgrounds. An impactful mentor may come from similar cultural upbringing, or from a similar economic background. It makes no sense to limit these opportunities.

The author implores that we ignore the "isms" that exist today such as racism or sexism. He forgets this country was founded with an acceptance of sexism and slavery; that Hispanics and African Americans were denied civil rights until the late 1960s. What we need to do is understand where we came from and support those

whom are truly working to progress from a time when the “isms” were plainly accepted.

Eric Diaz is chief financial officer of Phoenix-based OYE! Business Intelligence. He can be reached at eric@oyeintelligence.com.