



THE NEW AGENDA FOR DIVERSITY IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

by **Gary A. Smith**

Following a two-year hiatus, I have restarted my column with *Minority Enterprise Advocate*. It's good to be back. MEA matters and I commend the founders for their insight, vision and perseverance. They represent us all and ensure the issues that matter, stay front and center.

In my "day job", I work with some of the world's largest and most complex organizations. My work focuses on diversity strategy, but more than that it ensures that leaders learn how to harness the power of difference to achieve mission success. It's a very simple goal that is complicated by history and the English language. I love what I do and I appreciate this opportunity to write about it. Diversity matters. It is changing the face of the world we live in and will prove to be an enabler of American competitiveness. But we must change the way we think about it. I look forward to connecting with you around this important topic.

I decided to have my re-launch, inaugural article focus on something I call, "The New Agenda for Diversity in the Federal Government". We have elected a new President. From the way he ran his campaign, to his leadership style, President Obama demonstrates the power of inclusion to make America a better place. These are trying economic times and the world economy is attempting to recover. Leadership, intellect and vision will matter.

The challenge with solving problems, especially really big problems is that it requires letting go of assumptions that hinder seeing the solution. One way to let go of assumptions or to challenge them is to let different people participate in the process. How we ensure that more people are in the room and contributing to crafting better solutions is what diversity is all about. As minority entrepreneurs we know the value of gaining entry into the room. Our success has always centered on access — to the deal, to capital, and to the non-financial resources we need to grow our businesses.

So why does a new agenda for diversity in government matter? Simply put, because the Federal Government matters. It shapes our world and often leads

the way for innovation and change. There is a partnership that exists between the public and private sectors that is often overlooked. The government buys more, hires more and influences more than we appreciate. Don't ignore this: the federal government hires more employees than any U.S. company, and the average compensation is double, yes double that of the private sector. The feds procure more goods and services than the Fortune 500 companies combined. The key is to ensure that diversity influences the way these critical decisions are made. When done correctly, minority business will benefit.

The breakthrough approach to diversity requires four critical components:

- Centralized diversity leadership that reports to the head of the Department
- Separate diversity from EEO, Civil Rights and Affirmative Action
- Focus on agency mission and the diversity of 21st century Americans
- Establish measures for workforce, workplace and marketplace performance

Now when I say diversity I should define my terms. I mean difference, all the things that make people different. It is our differences that create better solutions, break through tough problems and ultimately create American competitiveness. That competitiveness requires minority business to thrive and grow. I'm happy to be back and I look forward to sharing perspectives, looking at our world through a diversity lens.

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