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Keynote speaker at the  
N.W. Diversity Conference.  
I have enclosed a  
copy of my speech for  
you.

There were 1000 present  
to hear thoughts on how to  
be successful. I identified  
you as a leader who did  
it right. Thank-you! KAG  
10-28-09

Dear Vic -

I again want to thank-  
you for taking the time to  
join me in my celebration  
at City Hall. It was truly  
a wonderful event for  
me.

On Tuesday I was the

October 27, 2009

Northwest Public Employees Diversity Conference  
Oregon Convention Center

Keynote Speaker: Kay Dean Toran – President/CEO of Volunteers of America Oregon

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## **“TIME TO DELIVER ON THE DREAM”**

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen.

What a major statement your presence is making here today. You and your employer are willing to dedicate substantial time away from your day-to-day responsibilities to focus on employment practices that are designed to achieve diversity in the workplace.

This says to me that you and your employer believe this goal; this vision of a diverse workplace is a priority worth investing in and supporting.

Thank you for being here and thanks to the planning committee and to you for allowing me to be a part of this very important day.

Over the last decade there have been many strategic planning sessions, thought-provoking seminars, and goal setting workshops designed to achieve diversity and inclusiveness in the workplace. These efforts have seen many name changes. In our recent past we called it a focus on achieving multi-culturalism. Prior to those strategic efforts, the emphasis was on setting and achieving affirmative action's goals. Now today along with goal-setting to achieve diversity, we also set as a strategic direction the goal of ensuring that an organization is culturally competent.

And it seems that whenever there is an economic downturn the Diversity officers, Diversity Committees and HR directors and some organization leaders raise questions and initiate conversations on how do we protect and preserve the progress, the gains that we have made in diversity.

How do we ensure that our actions in downsizing, rightsizing and reductions in force do not have a disparate impact on the very groups that we have targeted to achieve diversity?

So, what is it that we are trying to achieve that we all say is important that every ten or fifteen years when there is an economic slump we fear we might lose it? What vision are we trying to achieve that we have not been able to institutionalize, to ensure that what we have achieved and accomplished is never put in jeopardy because of environmental factors and economic changes?

Well, in answering those questions, let's look at where we have been, where we are today and where we must go if we are to have a nation that fulfills the promise presented to us in the Declaration of Independence.

I want you to leave here today with some answers to those questions.

I want you to leave here today knowing that we have a legal, moral/if not patriotic, and economic reason for ensuring that we have a culturally diverse workplace. Those of us in this room have an obligation and an opportunity to lead in the workplace in such a way that we are able to achieve this dream that was foreseen and promised by our forefathers.

The time is now for us to fulfill that promise. The time is now for us to achieve the promise of the United States of America... And let me tell you why. We have been on this journey, sometimes painful but always hopeful, for a very, very long time.

First, what is our history? Thomas Jefferson and our founding fathers said in that historical founding document, the Declaration of Independence; "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness..." in these United States.

(Now whether they truly meant all men and all women, we will never know, but it is interpreted that they did.) That was and is the vision. That was the dream and that is the promise. It was bold. It was courageous and it was right!

Let's fast forward to the middle of the twentieth century, beginning with President Truman. Most do not associate this President with civil rights, but it was his leadership that kick-started the modern civil rights legislative agenda that has resulted in the legal foundation for diversity as we know it today.

President Truman stated that equality was an essential, let me say it again, an essential goal of the United States of America. One of his bold actions was to issue an executive order that ordered the desegregation of the federal workforce.

Even President, Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was Republican and considered to be a moderate conservative, saw the necessity of achieving equality in our nation. Though he privately stated that he knew it would be challenging to achieve this goal because a change in attitude was more important than legislation. It was his civil rights bill that was issued that aimed at ensuring that all African Americans could exercise their right to vote.

Then in the 1950s and forward there was a flurry of actions that put the civil rights movement into high gear.

We had the 1956 Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court decision that guarantees a right to an equal education. This court decision began the process of tearing down the practice of separate but equal in the United States of America and enforcing the fairness doctrine promised in the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment.

Building on that decision we saw the following:

There was the 1960 Montgomery bus boycott - a protest movement that resulted in blacks no longer being required to sit in the back of the bus in the south.

There was the leadership of President Kennedy to ensure the rights and protection of blacks in the USA, and if necessary with the support of law enforcement.

There was the 1963 March on Washington where Dr. Martin Luther King delivered his visionary “I have a Dream” speech.

The march was a well-orchestrated and executed demonstration that demanded that the President and Congress pass legislation to ensure the civil rights of blacks, other minorities and women.

Then in 1964 the Civil Rights Act signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson. This act includes language that protects the civil rights of all.

And not the least, the 1965 Executive Order on Affirmative Action issued by President Johnson

There have been many laws passed that make up the legal framework for the legal guarantee of equal rights and equal protection under the law. Executive orders issued at the federal and state level require affirmative action plans and practices that level the playing field for those who have been impacted by past discriminatory practices.

There have been court cases that have carefully tried to balance the equal rights of all.

The point that I am making here is that in the United States of America there is a legal requirement that we protect the rights and ensure equality for all. The other point that I am making is that this has been a very long, focused journey dedicated to us “getting it right” in our nation.

In 2009 it is time for us to deliver on the dream. It is now time for us to keep the promise of all of our founding fathers and elected leaders.

This is why we now have the vision within organizations to achieve a workforce that is diverse, inclusive and culturally competent.

Leaders and employers recognize that it is the right thing to do, but is also a workforce necessity. If we are to provide the highest quality of services, if we are to meet the needs of anyone or everyone that comes through our front doors seeking services, if we are to achieve the outcomes and results that we promise those who fund our work—taxpayers, and the public at large, we can only do so with a highly competent, talented representative workforce.

Now is the time to embrace the vision and to institutionalize the practices. We must be proactive—not reactive. We must not put the focus on what we do in a downturn, but rather place the emphasis on what steps we must take during the upturn.

What are the best practices that lead to the institutionalization of the vision? What do we need to do to ensure that the practices and policies that we have in place on a day-to-day basis will ensure that we never have practices that impact people of color, women, the disabled or any member of the protected classes disproportionately?

So, what steps do we need to take? What actions are required? How do we insure that we are engaged in best practices?

I would like to illustrate for you how leaders can make a difference with a personal story.

At age 28, a year out of graduate school, I was approached by the Dean of the school to consider a teaching position within the School of Social Work. I have to say I was both stunned and flattered. I was stunned because I had never given any thought to teaching on any level. I was a Social Worker.

Flattered that the Dean could possibly think I could take on such a position at his school. I said "thank—you, but no thanks." We shook hands and he left.

A week later I was visited in my office by a group of first year social work students who said the Dean had told them about the conversation and he asked them to visit with me to see if they could persuade me to re-consider. They said a lot of planning had occurred to develop a program that was needed in the school's curriculum and a lot of planning and discussion had occurred to identify me as the best professional for the role that had been established.

I decided to meet with the Dean again and strongly suggested that he do a nationwide recruitment (this is how it works in higher ed.!). I told him I would apply and if through that process he felt I was the top candidate for the position I would accept.

I thought the process would rule me out, but it not only ruled me in, the Dean ultimately offered the job to me after the process.

Now I was still not feeling like I was ready for a professorship, but a couple of other things happened here that I will never forget. The Dean very quietly made sure I had a support system of other members of the faculty and he periodically checked in with me personally to do his own reality check. Without ever saying anything overtly he wanted to make sure that I was comfortable in the setting. He also made sure that I had opportunities to interact with all of the School faculty and with faculty and staff from throughout the University. He also made sure I was able to attend training and conferences to support my work.

The Dean regularly communicated his vision around being a school that was responsive to issues of poverty and race. I knew he was not himself comfortable in this role, but he knew that he needed to do so to keep the school relevant.

I stayed five wonderful years on the faculty before I took the next step in my career.

A second story I want to share with you is about working for a "conservative" Republican Governor as the state's director of Affirmative Action. The reason this is an important story is that most people from the outside looking in did not expect this Governor to be as assertive and visionary in his attempts to achieve equality and equity in state government.

When he hired me, he stated that he wanted during his tenure as Governor, to see positions at the top level filled with people who looked like me. That is a direct quote. He supported affirmative action efforts as aggressively as anyone for whom I have worked. He personally would attend conferences to share his vision. He appeared before editorial boards. He visited communities of color. He made a difference.

During his term of office we saw an African American Dean of the U of O Law School who was hired away from Harvard's School of Law. We saw the first African American male to lead a major division within the Department of Human Services. He had a 17-year career in that position. We saw a white female hired as Director of one of the largest departments in state government. We saw the first female appointed to the Oregon Supreme Court. We saw a Native American who was the Director of the Department of Corrections. We saw many women and people of color in other high management positions during that eight-year period.

The Governor is Governor Victor Atiyeh.

Good news – best statistical record in Affirmative Action in state history. Bad news – 23 years later it is still the best.

What do these stories tell you?

1. There was a vision and a high commitment by a catalytic, visionary leader of the organization that recognized the importance of inclusiveness and diversity. The vision was clearly stated, communicated and demonstrated by that leader. The leader communicated this priority in person, in cabinet or senior team meetings, in the media and in the community at large the message was clear and continuous. There was direct support from the top.

Does the head of your organization have regular contact with the leader of diversity to know first-hand the needs, the progress, the successes, and the challenges within the organization? Does the leader issue policy directives under his or her name to share with the larger workforce that he or she sees this cultural transformation as a goal and expectation? Verbal support from the CEO, Executive Director or head of the organization is critical for an effective diversity effort. The chief diversity officer must report directly to or have direct access and regular contact with the head of the organization for the highest degree of effectiveness and achievement.

2. In my story the leaders were courageous. They were willing to take bold actions and some risks. Rules and processes were defined for the hiring process. In the first story, the Dean believed the candidate had the skills but needed an opportunity to demonstrate that she was the most qualified person for the job. The leader took into consideration traditional qualifications, but also life experiences, volunteer experiences and other non-traditional activities in the candidate's background. All of this together contributed to the talents and gifts this individual brought to the position. The leader knew there would be some push-back. So, he informed, educated and cultivated his key senior leaders to know he made the hiring decision and what goals he was determined to achieve. They then worked together to communicate the messages throughout the organization that diversity was a priority, was an expectation, and was necessary. Managers would be held accountable for results.

Is your leader seen as communicating the importance of diversity? Is she or he visible? Does he or she raise questions of progress, of challenges, of results? Does the leader have a process to have policy and procedure reviewed to support the vision?

3. In my story there was a need to examine and change hiring practices. To accomplish this goal policies needed to be reviewed and in some instances, updated and changed. The leader was willing to initiate such changes.

These changes were designed to ensure outreach, fairness, openness and choice. (Does your employer have in place a system that regularly allows for the examination of policy and practice to determine if any has a disparate impact on any group?)

4. Specific goals and objectives and measurable evaluation criteria were used in these examples to ensure progress. In state government a law was passed to require department directors to include a report on affirmative action results with their biennial budgets. (Can you identify specific goals and objectives and indicators in your organization around diversity?)

Do you have broad recruitment practices to ensure a broad candidate pool for positions; particular positions at the top of the organization? Is this recruitment practice a requirement? Do you have policies and established criteria that allow you to directly appoint a candidate who is seen as highly qualified and comes from one of the targeted classes? The fishing net must be cast wide and far to ensure a candidate pool that is diverse.

5. Representative selection panels were put in place to ensure a diverse perspective in the selection process. (Do you have such panels in your selection processes?)
6. Orientation, supervision, training, and mentors were made available to ensure the success of employees who were hired. These are practices that should be guaranteed to EVERY employee hired into the organization. (Does your employer invest in such practices?)
7. Regular performance feedback. Are there specific goals related to diversity in performance appraisal and compensation processes?

If it is important it will be measured. (Talk about annual performance appraisal vs. regular, on-going feedback about goals and objectives. Talk about which is more effective.)

There was training and mentoring in place to increase the possibility of success. Are there training goals in place for all staff?

8. Are there policies in place that direct how workforce reductions are to be made? Are these decisions based on performance and qualifications? If not, should they be? Should there be advisory committees to review policies and make recommendations on how such personnel decisions should be made when there is a reduction in force. If so, who is included on these advisory committees—managers, supervisors, employees, rep from labor unions, community reps?
9. Does your organization have a diversity leader or committee that participates in periodic culture assessment? This is an assessment that provides information on progress, changes or self-corrections that might be needed to ensure goals are being achieved. These assessments are not meant nor designed to “whip” the organization. Rather, they are meant to be a helpful tool to achieve diversity.

What I am describing here, today, are steps that are necessary if the organization is to have a work culture that supports diversity. These are best practices that require a conscious, concerted effort with dedicated resources. These practices that, if embraced, will ensure that the vision will be realized and, and just as important, will be institutionalized.

... But today I want to go farther.

Let's say we have everything in place—a catalytic, visionary committed leader; clear goals and objectives, effective communication systems, a representative staff, clear policies and procedures, regular and ongoing performance evaluations—in addition to commitment, courage and competency.

We got it going on!

Is this enough? I say NO. We need to answer the next question.

Why do we do this? Some of you may have that question right now. Some of you may even be saying privately, if you just published the job requirements and hire the most qualified person, we should be able to get the job done.

In there lies the challenge. Our past systems and efforts don't necessarily ensure that we know what makes up the best qualified designation.

Does the top score on an exam produce the best qualified person for the job, for school, for the profession? Does the best GPA ensure the best job performance? Does the SAT, LSAT, GRE tell you who will be the most successful in a job or in ones profession?

We simply don't know enough to make those correlations. The kinds of scores tell us something, but not all that we need to know.

So, part of our role in management is to ensure to the degree possible that we have job qualifications and requirements that match the job that needs to be done-- that the talents we seek match the talents that are required. (Give some examples here).

But once we get past the qualification question, there is still the question, why do all of this? Do we really need to do this?

Well, why do we do it? Why make this investment? Why stay with this strategic direction to achieve equality and diversity.

Why continue this journey?

In part we want to do this because of the financial, economic and social reasons.

There is the economic necessity of both attracting and retaining talented employees. There is also the economic requirement of delivering a more effective product or service.

There is a richness that inclusiveness and diversity bring to the workforce. And let's be clear about what we are talking about when we use the term diverse and inclusive. We are talking about race, gender, and people with disabilities, gays, lesbians and transgendered individuals, young people, older persons, people of different cultures and backgrounds, other non-traditional categories and yes, white people.

We are talking about bringing the promise of America to fruition. We are talking about your employer.

.....And what do we achieve?

- 1.** We achieve perspectives or outlooks that come from people, from individuals who are different. These enriched perspectives are important to service delivery and results.
- 2.** We achieve better decision-making and improved problem-solving because of the synergy that comes with and from diverse populations.
- 3.** There is more questioning and testing that contributes to more creativity and innovation.
- 4.** The service delivery system is enhanced.
- 5.** Diversity give us a richer product, a better served client or customer
- 6.** Diversity gives us a more effective organization.
- 7.** And for those who care and we all do, there is a better bottom line. Economically, diversity makes a BIG difference. We are relevant, we are sensitive. We are effective!

But, diversity and inclusiveness does not come without some challenges.

For an organization to be truly successful with the implementation of its diversity strategy, it must manage it effectively. It requires an investment by its employer. When one brings different groups together with different backgrounds, cultures, languages and rich perspectives, there is a greater chance of misunderstandings and disagreements.

Because we are all products of the culture of the United States of America there is the possibility of cultural bias, prejudice and various forms of illegal discrimination. There are actions and oversights that contribute to hurt feelings, disenfranchisements and withdrawals on the part of the affected party.

Often these miss-steps, oversights, and painful mistakes are unintended, but the impact on the affected party is still the same. (Use the example of the Race for the Cure during the Jewish Holy week.)

The entire organization must be committed to ensure that these challenges are addressed and responded to as quickly and carefully as possible.

The process of becoming culturally competent requires considerable self-awareness, considerable sensitivity and a commitment to continuous learning and a commitment to responsiveness.

This leads me to the last "best practice" discussion and the reason that I am excited to be here with you today.

I have talked about the catalytic visionary leader being an important ingredient in the plan to be successful with the implementation of diversity efforts.

Well, the real leader in this process is YOU! Each of you!

Each of you has the opportunity to define yourself as the leader in control of your role and responsibilities within the organization. It is YOU who can define your vision of your job. It is YOU who can establish your personal job practices that lead to ensuring a successful diverse workforce.

It is YOU that has the power to make things happen in the area for which you are responsible.

It is YOU that can be the catalyst to ensure a diverse perspective. It is also YOU who can prevent the isolation of one—that feeling that is a part of an individual who is different and the only one in the group.

It is YOU who can challenge the way things are done and ask the hard questions.

It is YOU who has the personal responsibility to make diversity happen in your workplace.

As I come to a close this afternoon, I want to acknowledge with you that we are a fast changing country, state, city and local community.

Recently, the Oregonian had an article about Portland being a “white “city. The suggestion was that we are out of step with other cities our size. In spite of that January 9, article, the current statistics from the Population Center at PSU is that Oregon will be a 50% minority by 2042. Our state and city are changing. There are many who believe we will hit that percentage and pass it long before 2042.

We can take a position that we have time, plenty of time, to respond to this new reality, this changing dynamic, or we can TODAY embrace the higher reason that we all need to be committed to diversity. We live in a world that includes people who are different.

Whether we are in Portland, Salem, California, New York, Asia, Africa, Europe or Latin America; the world includes people of all colors, backgrounds, cultures, size, age and gender.

Our challenge as a member of the human race is to know how to live with each other in a responsible, respectful manner.

The differences among people are intentional. The creator made it so or otherwise we would all look the same. The differences were intended to enrich and enhance us as people.

In the same way that we have beautiful flowers that are red, yellow, purple and white; in the same way that we have roses, dahlias, irises, and lilies; some have long stems other are short stemmed; But when we pick them and put them all together, we have a beautiful, fragrant bouquet.

The same is true with people. When we bring our differences together in the form of diversity we are a richer people. When we learn to celebrate and appreciate our many, unique differences, our organizations, our communities, our neighborhoods, our families; each of us as individuals are stronger, so much more capable, and so much more competent.

When we recognize and accept that we are stronger in our diversity and inclusiveness than we are in standing alone, we will come together as a transformed culture.

We will continue on this journey to achieve the promise of America. We have made considerable progress but there is more for us to do to be the best that we are capable of being. There is more for us to do to deliver on the dream.

As I leave you today, I challenge you. I challenge you to be the bold leader like the ones I referred to earlier—like Truman, like Eisenhower, like Kennedy, like Martin Luther King, like Lyndon Johnson and Atiyeh. Don't embrace these changes because of polls, public opinion or surveys. I challenge you to do it because it is the right thing to do.

I challenge you to be the catalytic, charismatic leader that comes to the workplace EVERYDAY and demonstrates your commitment to diversity, to inclusiveness, to equality and to equity. I challenge you to do this for the sake of the excellence in our organizations.

I challenge you to bring your gifts and talents to make your personal contribution in leading us to the beautiful dream that is both the foundation and the promise of the United States of America.

And this is the great part.

If we are each successful, we are all successful and...

If we are all successful then we can raise our cups and stand together and celebrate the soul of America, and

When we celebrate the soul of America, we together will have delivered on the dream.

Thank you.