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When It Comes To HR What You Don't Know **CAN** Hurt You

Attracting Hispanics Requires Cultural Awareness

by guest writer Rebecca R. Hastings, SPHR, Online editor/manager for SHRM

To attract, retain and engage Hispanics and Latinos, employers need to understand the common—and unique—characteristics of the various cultures that fall under the label of “Hispanic,” according to Di Ann Sanchez, SPHR, president and founder of DAS HR Consulting LLC in Hurst, Texas.

“People from 22 different countries of origin are considered to be Hispanic,” she said during a concurrent session of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) 2012 Talent Management Conference & Exposition held April 30-May 2.



“Hispanic is a culture, not a race.”

Although Sanchez noted that the label “Hispanic” is a government term, rather than one adopted by those who fall within the demographic group, it’s a term most don’t mind and many prefer over the label “Latino,” she said, citing data released April 4, 2012, by the Pew Hispanic Center.

Often, however, individuals will identify themselves by their family’s country of origin, she said, which is why she urged employers not to “lump Hispanics into one category.”

Highlights of 2010 Census

In order to help conference attendees understand the population of potential applicants, Sanchez summarized a few facts from the 2010 U.S. Census:

- Sixty-six percent of Hispanics in the U.S. are of Mexican descent.
- The median age of Hispanics is 27.4, compared to the U.S. average age of 36.8.
- Hispanics have an average of four children per household, while non-Hispanic households have an average of two.
- Hispanics made up 16 percent of the U.S. population in 2010. By 2050, it is projected that 30 percent of the population will be Hispanic.

“The majority of the Hispanic population is still blue collar,” she noted. “Education is our challenge,” she added, because it is difficult for large families to fund a college education and because parents with a below average English reading level sometimes have a hard time filling out financial aid applications.

What Recruiters Need to Know

The applicant pool will vary based on location, Sanchez noted, with Puerto Ricans and Cubans mostly on the East Coast and Mexicans mostly in the West. And the level of English skills and American acculturation will depend in part upon whether someone is a first,



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second or third generation immigrant.

Though differences exist based on country of origin, Sanchez said, there are some common characteristics recruiters and hiring managers will need to understand in order to attract and retain Hispanics:

- **Family is the most important value.** Adult children stay home until they get married and tend to live at home during college. Thus, each household is likely to have multiple workers and several family members. Anything that involves families or enables employees to spend more time with family will appeal to members of this population.
- **Individuals look to their “elders”—the individuals that help the family navigate acculturation issues in the U.S.—for work-related guidance.** Such individuals are not necessarily of advanced age, and some might not even be related to employees, but they can play a critical role in helping Hispanic colleagues find jobs, understand policies and deal with challenges in the workplace. “HR practitioners: Find your elders,” said Sanchez. “If you are doing any kind of change management, you need to make sure they understand.”
- **Hard work is valued.** “We came to this country for the American dream ... to live, work and provide for our families.” And that means the extended family, she noted, including those in the country of origin who continue to receive financial support from those working in the U.S. Employee referral programs are an ideal way to generate candidates, she said, adding that Hispanics will not refer family members if they are not hard workers because it’s a negative representation of the family.
- **Preserving the culture and language is a priority.** As the Pew report revealed, three-quarters of Hispanics believe that it is very important for future generations of Hispanics in the U.S. to be able to speak Spanish. Thus, it’s helpful to provide application and employment information, such as employee handbooks, in Spanish. “Be cautious about discriminating against those with accents,” Sanchez warned. “They are very sensitive about accents.”

Diversity and inclusion efforts such as mentoring programs, employee affinity groups and community involvement are likely to appeal to Hispanic applicants as well, said Sanchez.