

The Face of a Changing Workforce—Challenges to Community Colleges

The conference theme of “Coloring Outside the Lines” couldn’t have been more perfect for Rosalind (Roz) Jeffries’ presentation. Because that’s exactly what the coming challenges to Community Colleges that Roz detailed will require.

Over 200 attendees representing more than 60 Community Colleges throughout the state of Ohio had filled the ballroom at the Cherry Valley Lodge in Newark, Ohio. Robert Johnson, Assistant Director of Workforce Development for the Ohio Board of Regents, introduced Roz. And for 45 minutes, she had the audience listening, laughing, squirming and learning about the future face of our workforce.

Roz noted that projected changes in the workforce are no longer in the future—they’re *here*. Over the next 4 to 6 years, we’ll experience workforce shortages coupled with record-breaking levels of age and ethnic diversity. Community Colleges are among the institutions that will be hardest hit by employee shortages. The reason? The leaders at the forefront of the Community College movement in the 1960s and ’70s are Baby Boomers who are now getting ready to retire. According to the AACC Leadership Series Research Brief:

- Almost half of Community College presidents plan to retire by 2007.
- One-third of senior administrators plan to retire by 2006.
- Fully half of faculty leaders expect to retire by 2004.

The resulting recruitment issues will be felt all along the traditional pipeline that supplies Community College leaders.

Future implications for Community Colleges

- *They can expect to return to a labor market reminiscent of the Clinton years, when employees had a choice of “great places to work.”* Jobs were plentiful, but qualified applicants were hard to find and even harder to hire. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects an increase of 20 million new jobs within the next six years, and retiring Baby Boomers are expected to vacate an additional 32 million jobs.

The implication for Community Colleges is that they will no longer be competing just among themselves for experienced or promising educational leaders; they will be facing heavy competition for talent from companies that have already begun aggressive and highly creative recruitment strategies. In order to fill the huge gap,

Community Colleges must be comparably aggressive and creative in competing for top talent.

- *For the first time in history, four generations are working side by side.* This means that understanding the formative factors and characteristics of each of the four generations is more important than ever before. Roz pointed out that most of the new employees entering the workforce will be from the 18–22 year-old group, commonly called Generation Yers. This generation in particular is focused on WIIFM (What’s-In-It-For-Me).
- *In addition to age diversity, the new workforce will reflect never before seen levels of gender and ethnic diversity.* Historically, the working population has been dominated by white males, but soon 70% of the workforce will be made up of minorities and women. As the age and face of the workforce changes, Community Colleges will be faced with many “moments of truth,” as they attempt to lure a new workforce that is focused on changing technology, life outside of work, continuing education on the job, and investing in their family life.

Staying Ahead of the Curve

Community Colleges will need Core Leadership Competencies in order to successfully navigate the impending changes in the workforce. These competencies, Roz said, will require a 50/50 balance between interpersonal skills and technical skills. Relationship building and great communication skills also will be key to success.

Roz challenged Community Colleges to revisit their strategies for long-term retention and development of leaders by looking at:

- Strategies that are quick-starting and innovative
- Policies and procedures (e.g., new employment contracts) that are flexible, and allow for personal growth and work/life balance
- Hiring processes that reflect a 10-day window to either hire or lose top talent
- People management practices that focus on leadership training, recognition and talent development.

In short, ***the Future is here.*** The New Workplace will focus on the individual and challenge organizations of all types to “color outside the lines.”