

Diversity

that embraces diversity with a goal of learning and integration is more effective at reaping the benefits of multiculturalism than one that tries to be “colorblind.” Valuing diversity is the philosophy at Life Technologies, says Diversity and Inclusion Leader **Ronita Griffin**. The company doesn’t stop at recruiting a varied workforce, but engages employees as diversity champions who act as mentors internally and as company ambassadors externally, at community diversity events. Life Technologies also trains its workforce in inclusion, which Griffin describes as “activating, respecting, leveraging, and enabling differences—learning how to recognize and take advantage of the rich diversity in our workforce.” Although workplace diversity training can be met with resistance, it can be engaging if it is practical, and answers questions that people feel uncomfortable asking. LGBT diversity training sessions can be intriguing, says Snowdon. “People welcome the opportunity to get their questions answered about populations they don’t know much about, like transgender people. Even employees who dread mandatory training often tell me they’ll go home and talk about LGBT issues—it’s ‘news they can use’.”



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—Cedric Herring

OVERHAULING THE SYSTEM

The pool of diverse, talented STEM-educated workers is increasing, but will not automatically flow into the workplace without institutional changes that require careful planning and flexibility. Debra Leonard says current career expectations in medical schools are “not realistic and not healthy. They are based on an old system when women took care of home responsibilities so men could work long hours. Today, we need to consider family care, for example offering childcare for travel to meetings, which are so important for professional development.” In a step in this direction, American Society for Cell Biology members can apply for childcare grants to attend the organization’s annual meeting, which offers advisory sessions on dual-career issues and other contemporary professional challenges. The National Science Foundation recently announced flexible funding policies to allow for time spent on family care.

Sandra Schmid calls for similar changes in academia. With two grown children and a husband, William Balch who is also a molecular biology professor, Schmid walks the walk of a modern scientist. She says the academic tenure system is an outdated, inflexible, “one size fits all” path that no longer serves science. Expecting to hit certain milestones at precise times is too limiting to accommodate a diverse scientific workforce. In the general U.S. population, more than 70 percent of mothers with children work, and science is no exception. People do their most exciting work at different times in their career, says Schmid, and should be evaluated for their overall potential, not just what they have done recently.

This is supported by results from a 2010 study of life science faculty at 50 universities (scim.ag/LZIIvW). Junior women faculty worked fewer hours per week than junior-level men, mainly in the research arena; the women’s teaching, administration, clinical, and professional activities were similar to men. However, women who were full professors worked more hours a week than men at the same level, especially in internal administration and external professional activities. This pattern probably reflects the greater family responsibilities of junior-level women, and the higher demand for senior-level women as institutions seek to demonstrate their diversity. This is why Schmid’s advice to scientists and administrators is, “Take the long view. Priorities are different at different stages of life, and demands and responses will change over time. Try to balance them over a career.”

In an upcoming book, *Critical Diversity: The New Case for Inclusion and Equal Opportunity*, Herring, with co-author Loren Henderson, is expanding his work on the benefits of corporate diversity to address LGBT, education, class, and wealth issues. “The bottom line,” says Herring, “is that we have to go beyond just celebrating diversity. We have to include people on an equitable basis.” Achieving this will take fundamental institutional changes, he says. “When you have groups of people who are systematically underrepresented, you have to change things to make sure they are systematically included.”

Chris Tachibana is a science writer based in Seattle, USA, and Copenhagen, Denmark

DOI: 10.1126/science.opms.r1200120

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Bayer USA Foundation
www.bayerus.com

Leadership Alliance
www.theleadershipalliance.org

Life Technologies
www.lifetechnologies.com

Merck & Co.
www.merck.com

University of California San Francisco Center for LGBT Health & Equity
lgbt.ucsf.edu

University of Illinois at Chicago
www.uic.edu

University of Texas Southwestern Medical School
www.utsouthwestern.edu

Weill Cornell Medical School
www.med.cornell.edu

Additional Resources

Association of Women in Science
www.awis.org

EntryPoint! Program
www.entrypoint.org

McNair Scholars
mcnairscholars.com

National Organization of Gay and Lesbian Scientists and Technical Professionals
www.noglstp.net

National Society of Black Engineers
www.nsbe.org

Out in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
www.ostem.org

Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers
www.shpe.org

Society of Women Engineers
www.swe.org