

Recruiter Builds Diversity Practice

Executive search firm **Rhodes Associates** has launched a platform to help commercial real estate companies hire and retain a more diverse team of professionals.

The Building Balance practice group, led by co-founders and partners **Neda Levy** and **Lisa Flicker**, along with engagement manager **Leina Braga**, was formed in response to growing demand from firms prioritizing diversity, equity and inclusion in their hiring pursuits.

The push to diversify hiring at real estate companies is being driven by pressure from capital partners as well as research indicating that diversity helps generate better returns. A year-old report from **McKinsey & Co.** found that companies with more diverse executive teams — measured by gender and ethnicity — tend to achieve above-average profitability and outperform their less diverse peers.

“We all feel passionately about this,” Flicker said. “Creating this program allowed us to use our expertise to fill a need in the marketplace while also helping to make a positive impact.”

As part of the launch, the firm is rolling out a website for the new practice and will host a series of webinars and other events.

The platform’s thesis is that achieving diversity requires a comprehensive approach. “DEI work is hard work,” Levy said. “It is not one-size-fits-all; it has to be customized.”

To that end, Rhodes’ practice employs a four-step approach that begins with leadership advisory, which involves a deep dive into a company’s hiring practices, retention efforts and culture. The assessment also looks at the team’s diversity from a broad perspective that involves a variety of backgrounds.

“It is not about counting,” Braga said. “It’s really about cultivating an inclusive environment” that enables firms to at-

tract and retain new hires from a wider pool of candidates. She joined the firm in February from **Concordia College** in Bronxville, N.Y., where she was director of international recruitment operations, helping to draw students from India and Brazil.

At Rhodes, she will work with companies to address stumbling blocks that may make it difficult to attract and keep diverse candidates. That can include looking at how a firm organizes social events, analyzing how internships are structured and compensated, and organizing seminars and training.

The practice also helps companies with “marketplace engagement,” raising awareness of the hiring company among a broader and more diverse network of candidates. Tactics include launching social-media campaigns, hosting events and building contacts with professional associations that can help create a more diverse pipeline of candidates.

That’s followed by talent acquisition, when Rhodes helps identify diverse candidates. The shop will assess skills within the current team to help refine the scope required for a new hire. Some candidates may not have a skill set “within the bull’s-eye,” but do have skills that are transferable, Flicker said.

The final component is retention strategy. “Our main goal is really to get people to feel like they belong to a company and that they are respected and expected,” Braga said. That entails one-on-one coaching with the hire while also working with the company to implement recommendations from the initial advisory phase to create an inclusive environment.

“Diverse hiring and retention go hand in hand. If [the new hire doesn’t] feel comfortable and included and able to thrive in the organization, they are going to leave,” Levy said. “Clients have to commit to doing the long-term hard work.” ❖

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