



What is a Chief Diversity Officer?

The emergence of Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs) began in the 1970's, during which a large influx of minorities began to integrate into all-white colleges and universities. At the time, CDOs were more commonly known as minority affairs officers, equal opportunity officers, and access officers. Their initial purpose was to manage the organizational implications of diversity growth, as well as prepare the institution for potential changes incurred by such growth. Today, CDO's have evolved into executive positions essential to the success of some of the most prominent business and academic institutions in the United States.

The primary duty of a CDO is to “conceptualize, define, assess, nurture, and cultivate diversity as an institutional and educational resource” (Williams and Wade, 2009). CDOs represent an organization's commitment to the importance of employing diversity and inclusion initiatives within any given setting. Yet, the duties and responsibilities of CDOs differ between institutions. For instance, CDOs employed in higher education may have a similar title than those working in the corporate arena, but their tasks are entirely distinct from each other.

CDOs in Business

According to Billy Dexter, author of “The Chief Diversity Officer Today” 81 of the top 100 Fortune 500 companies employ a CDO (2). Dexter also found that approximately 300 of the companies listed on the Fortune list have an executive position specifically designated for diversity. Thus, as the position becomes more prevalent in the business world, it is important to understand how the duties of corporate CDOs vary between institutions.

In business, CDOs are often depended upon to modify an institution's cultural image to attract a more diverse clientele and workforce. To be fully effective, corporate CDOs must ensure their business acknowledges and complies with all laws

concerning equal opportunity and discrimination. Corporate CDOs must also study and evaluate the company's composition in order to truly understand how to diversify its personnel. For instance, if the company's workforce lacks employees of a certain ethnic group, or even employees of a certain educational background, the CDO prepares recruitment programs and/or diversity training initiatives in order to meet institutional needs.

Corporate CDOs are usually required to have a master's degree or Ph.D. in a human resources or management field.

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CDOs in Academia

Much like the corporate arena, the duties and responsibilities of a CDO working in higher education varies depending upon the needs of the academic institution. For instance, Morehead State University, located in Morehead, Kentucky, asks that their CDO “serve as a liaison and develop partnerships within communities to promote diversity as an essential element of the mission of the University.” Clemson University, located in

South Carolina, expects their CDO to promote collaboration and cohesion between university programs, which will ultimately “provide focus and accountability for equity and inclusion efforts across the University.” Here at Texas State University, our CDO, Dr. Herman Horn, has a much more distinctive role. We sat down with Dr. Horn and spoke with him about the specific duties of his profession.

Interview with Dr. Herman Horn

In our interview with Dr. Horn, former Chief Diversity Officer at Texas State University, we sought to understand the requirements, responsibilities, and challenges associated with his position. We found Dr. Horn to have quite an extensive list of academic and professional attributes.

As an active duty member of the U.S. Armed Forces, Horn pursued a Masters in Public Administration with a focus in Administrative Organization and Management. Horn believes this degree proved invaluable to his ability to “operate successfully in public entities”, though he asserts that his doctoral studies here at Texas State University “provided the greatest opportunity for growth and understanding of diversity as it relates to equal opportunity and social justice.”

Horn also has experience as an equal employment opportunity professional, as well as being a civil rights investigator and supervisor. His involvement with the military provided opportunities working with diverse populations, including South Africans during

the end of Apartheid. Horn states these experiences prepared him for the “regulatory and legal aspects of this position.”

According to Horn, CDOs must advocate fair treatment for all with “no priority of a particular group over another.” Horn lists several attributes aspiring CDO’s must possess, including being a great listener, conciliator, counselor, and communicator. Horn also addresses a necessity for validation, in that CDO’s must prove their commitment to diversity with satisfactory results.

Horn ensures that he is not solely responsible for diversity at Texas State., but rather that the duty is reserved for executive leadership. Instead, Horn asserts that “achieving diversity should not be levied on a position or office. Effort to achieve diversity is a shared responsibility starting from the top leadership.”

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