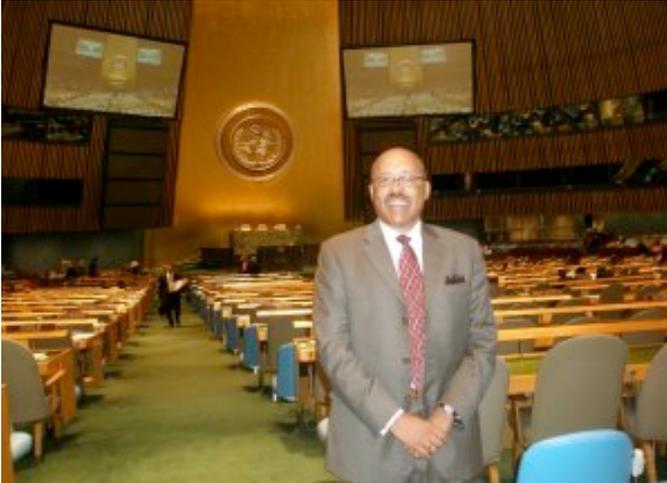


Collaborative Leadership - A New Mindset for Tackling Global Issues

November 2007

Weyerhaeuser Chief Diversity Officer Discusses Respect, Diversity with UN General Assembly



Effenus Henderson, Chief Diversity Officer of Weyerhaeuser Company, shared with ELI his experience of speaking before the United Nations General Assembly on October 4, 2007. He and representatives from approximately 150 countries were invited by Assembly President Srgian Kerim to discuss freedom of religion and belief and the need for respect for a diversity of religions and cultures. Representatives included leaders from various religious, governmental, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as experts from the private sector. Henderson participated in a discussion about best practices and strategies for fostering inter-religious and intercultural cooperation in a corporate environment. Below are some comments Henderson shared with ELI's Utoia Mims about the experience.

Photograph courtesy of Effenus Henderson taken October 4, 2007

General Observations

Having never presented at the UN before, Henderson was unsure of what to expect. However, he was moved by the stories shared and the opportunity to provide his insights in such a global forum. He was amazed people from countries as diverse as Japan, Argentina, France, and Tanzania were able to relate to his personal experience. The head of the delegation from Philippines, one of sponsoring nations, expressed how impressed he was that the remarks were personalized and had strong relevance to the broader issue.

Additionally, one of the panel members said that as result of Henderson's presentation, there was a better appreciation and understanding for the need to have dialogue and engagement from the private sector.

Key Excerpts From Henderson's Presentation

"The whole issue is that in our hands, we hold a lot of the knowledge and resources necessary to really make change; the real challenge is how do you engage and invite folks to the table so that everyone's perspective is appreciated, embraced, and built into the decisions that are made..."

"...Part of the whole inclusion strategy is really allowing people to feel comfortable in bringing more of who they are to the table in such a way that you can relate to them on a personal level. In sharing a unique personal story you will find that there are folks from around the world who have had similar experiences. When you get down to the nucleus of who we are (family and human beings), there are a lot of similarities in the way we approach life and our families..."

"...In the US we have been focused on traditional diversity topics around race and gender; however If we are truly emerging into more of a global environment we really need to be mindful and respectful of what people from people from different cultural backgrounds and traditions bring to the table..."

"...Major corporations are increasingly creating economies for many countries. Therefore, you can't try to solve global issues with just government and NGOs; you have to bring in a "civil society" which includes business sector to solve issues inclusively. Historically the UN and NGOs have not had the best of relationships with the private sector. If problems are going to be solved, all parties involved must learn to work in ways that are more inclusive."

Tips for Building a Diverse, Inclusive Corporate Culture

When asked what advice he could share with other ELI clients about the process of building a diverse, inclusive culture, Henderson emphasized that first and foremost, we must not just think of these topics as workplace issues.

“These issues should impact every aspect of our lives,” he says. “I think part of the whole challenge is really looking at educational strategies that seek not to impose a particular point of view or perspective, but instead begin as a dialogue where people can bring more of who they are in a way that is respectful and inclusive.”

He further elaborated:

I see as an example an emerging trend in social responsibility and global sustainability. If we are committed to really changing the earth, the way to address global issues is not prescribing a remedy that you from your point of view have about how to solve a problem; rather engage those who may, based on their traditions and history, have a different point of view. Then in a collaborative way you can create a shared mindset around things we all know we have to work together to solve – eliminating war, strategies to protect the earth, strategies specific to money and profitability and so forth.

What we do know is that people really want to feel that their backgrounds and perspectives and cultures are being respected and valued. The process of building a diverse and inclusive corporate culture is about creating learning communities and ways to help people understand their biases (some of which are unconscious) in terms of how they react to those who happen to be different, in whatever form fashion that might come across as. And so the goal is to think much more inclusively about strategies in our companies, communities, and society.

Henderson also shared some of the challenges Weyerhaeuser has faced in building and maintaining a civil workplace. “We are representative of a number of companies – we’ve not mastered this,” he notes. “We are all students of this area; no one is really an authority.”

He also points out that it’s an ongoing process: “The road to building and maintaining a civil workplace is a journey. You don’t treat this as an event, an activity, or an initiative. It must be viewed as a social change and a process in organizational development.”

For the strategies to be effective, he says, “[they] must be integrated into the fabric of the company and its business strategies.” He emphasizes that “they must be driven by the CEO and the leadership team. The leaders have to embrace it, they have to understand it and must be willing to step out on faith and take courageous steps to make changes necessary and treat it as a long-term process...The real critical dimensions are leadership, role modeling the behavior, and treating this as an organizational development and change process.”

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