

At Diversity Summit, attendees learn how inclusion and sharing fit into efforts to create the strongest Boeing

By GEOFF POTTER

The fundamental thrust of diversity at Boeing is to unleash the full potential of employees' collective talents, backgrounds and perspectives so everyone can help deliver on the company's promising future, leaders said recently.

Tapping into the skills and experiences of Boeing's diverse work teams and leveraging that knowledge is crucial to help the company reach the overarching goal outlined at the 2008 Diversity Summit by Boeing Chairman, President and CEO Jim McNerney: to build the strongest, best and best-integrated aerospace company in the world, for today—and tomorrow.

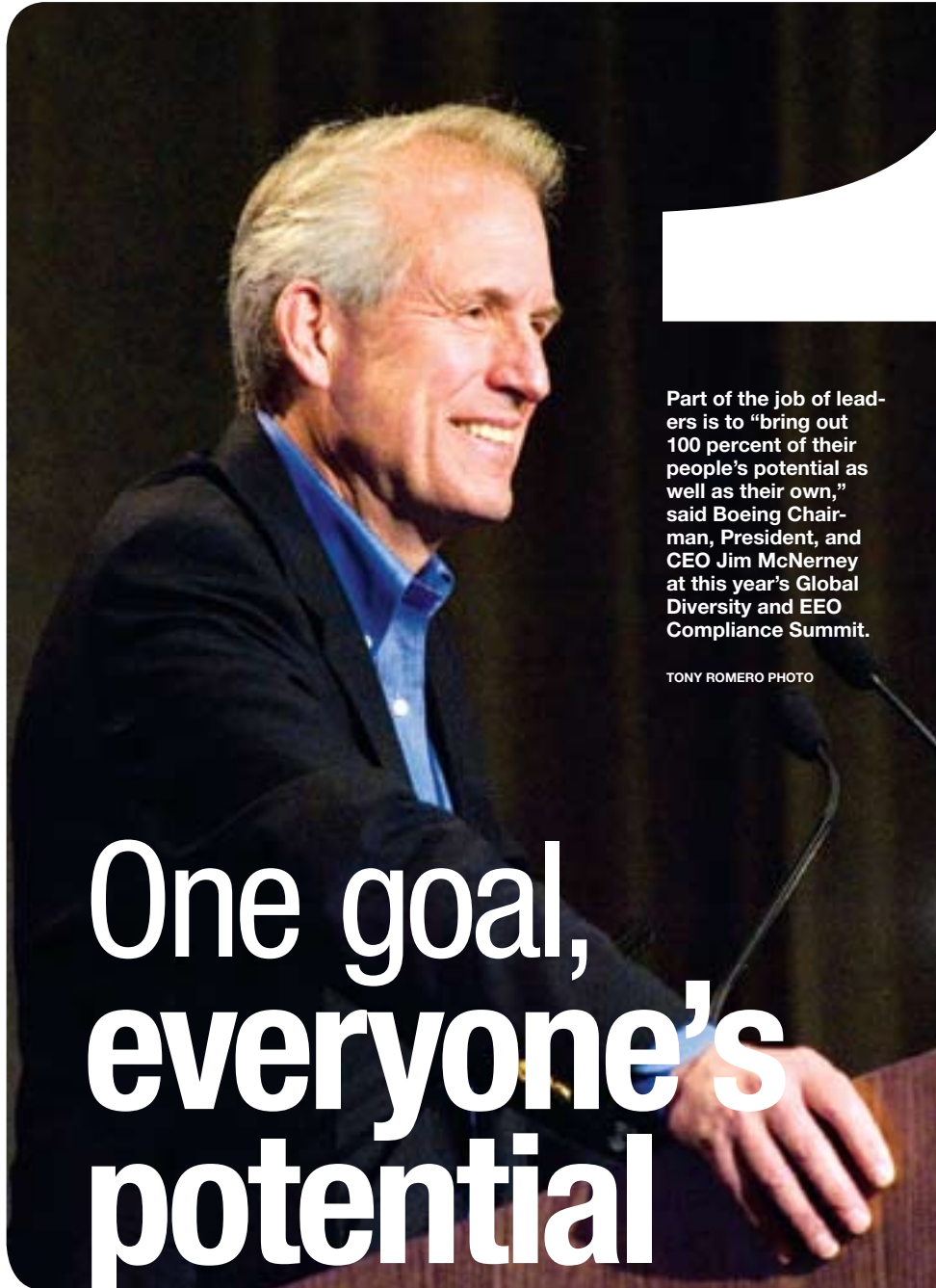
That takes leadership, and part of the job of leaders is to "bring out 100 percent of their people's potential as well as their own," McNerney reminded the nearly 1,300 attendees of the sixth annual Global Diversity and EEO Compliance Summit. The event, titled "Leveraging Unique Contributions for Business Success," took place last month in Irvine, Calif.

McNerney tied the concept of diversity—in all its facets, including race, ethnicity, gender, work background and life experience—directly to productivity and growth.

"At Boeing, we are just as committed to continuous improvement in diversity and inclusion as we are to continuous improvement in our business performance," he said. "Like growth and productivity, each fuels the other."

For the company to keep up with its customers over time, Boeing needs to gather different perspectives, break down barriers—between individuals, geographic locations and business units—and share knowledge to accelerate innovation, McNerney said.

No single individual knows all the answers, especially in the complex and ever-changing aerospace market, McNerney said. "Innovation comes far more often from a diverse team, freely exchanging ideas, than it does from a solitary genius or an insulated team with the occasional 'aha'



Part of the job of leaders is to "bring out 100 percent of their people's potential as well as their own," said Boeing Chairman, President, and CEO Jim McNerney at this year's Global Diversity and EEO Compliance Summit.

TONY ROMERO PHOTO

One goal, everyone's potential

moment along the way," he said.

"No one person or group corners the market on good ideas," added Boeing Chief Financial Officer James Bell at the summit. "Great technology is not all invented here. Leveraging different perspectives, experiences and capabilities helps diverse teams achieve more creative solutions to better address our customers' needs."

Citing examples of how Boeing business units have benefited from exchanging people and ideas, McNerney counseled: "Reach out to others. Share what you know,

and pull from what they know. When our culture is inclusive and supports sharing across Boeing, the company wins ... and we all win."

Here's a look at some of the other happenings and lessons shared from this year's event.

DIVERSITY = PRODUCTIVITY

Is having a diverse work force important? According to a University of Michigan professor cited by McNerney and others at the summit, it's essential.



MICHAEL GAIL PHOTO

This year's Diversity Summit drew 1,300 people—up 30 percent from the 2007 event. Among this year's participants were 519 managers, a record number.

In his new book, Scott Page, a professor of complex systems, political science and economics at Michigan, demonstrates that incorporating variety in staffing and work teams—listening to individuals with different ethnicities, cultural backgrounds and perspectives—creates enterprises with greater innovation, better solutions and higher productivity.

In a recent *New York Times* profile, Page described the findings of the math model detailed in his book: “What the model showed was that diverse groups of problem solvers outperformed the groups of the best individuals at solving problems. The reason: the diverse groups got stuck less often than the smart individuals, who tended to think similarly.”

“It would follow that in a business setting the more diverse group would bring its company the greater competitive advantage,” McNerney said.

WELCOME, MANAGERS

Attendance at the annual summit has grown substantially as more and more managers find that the discussions, classes and guest speakers can help them to identify and remove barriers to inclusion and to build and lead increasingly diverse—and productive—work teams.

This year's summit drew about 1,300 participants. That figure represents an increase of 30 percent from last year and is three times the number that attended the first summit in 2003. Importantly, more than 730 of the 2008 participants had never attended a Diversity Summit before. And the number of managers who attended—519, up 41 percent from 2007—reached a record high.

“There was so much interest in the Summit this year that registration had to close more than a month ahead of schedule,” said Joyce Tucker, senior vice president of Global Diversity and Employee Rights. “Our leaders recognize that understanding, embracing and leveraging diversity is critical to our business success.”

Seeing the benefits of the event's content, more Boeing managers have begun to budget for their team members to attend the event, Tucker said. They usually rotate their teams' participants so more employees have the chance to attend and learn, she added.

David Bowman, vice president and general manager of IDS Global Mobility Systems, brought his entire leadership team. “The summit knocked their socks off, and I had great team and individual discussions with each of them during the

week,” he said. “They're all going back and putting thoughts to plans and plans to actions. They want to be measured on their performance in this important area.”

Attendees are expected to return to their teams and lead meetings and one-on-one discussions to educate their colleagues about diversity and inclusion, including tools and techniques that encourage employees of diverse backgrounds to contribute their insights and help teams overcome business challenges.

SPREADING THE WORD

Surveys indicate that the nearly 1,000 employees who participated last year spread much of what they learned at 2007 summit to a minimum of 30,000 Boeing people. And all participants were asked to create a detailed action plan to foster inclusion at their work sites and spread valuable learnings from the event to colleagues who did not attend. ■

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For more on the Global Diversity Summit, see page 44.

Greatness, despite disabilities

The audience for the keynote address of Karen Meyer (seated), a deaf TV reporter who gave the keynote address at this year's Global Diversity and EEO Compliance Summit, gives the visual signal for applause after her speech.

MICHAEL GAIL PHOTO

Lance Armstrong. Beethoven. FDR. Magic Johnson. Homer (the ancient Greek poet, not the cartoon dad).

These individuals are known for their exceptional skill in a profession. They gained fame and accomplished much, despite facing what for many others has been a crippling disability (respectively, their disabilities were cancer, deafness, polio-caused infirmity, HIV/AIDS, and blindness). And each encountered the disability as an adult, yet went on to achieve greatness.

That last fact was a central point of an address made by Karen Meyer, a keynote speaker at this year's Boeing Global Diversity and EEO Compliance Summit. Meyer is a Chicago TV reporter who was born deaf.

Meyer called attention to the fact that "the disabled" is the one minority group that anyone can join, at any time, because of the random nature of health issues. As Jeffery Sykes, president of the Boeing Employees Ability Awareness Association, put it: "We're all just one step away from joining this club."

In the face of disabilities, however, many people accomplish a tremendous amount—certainly not without struggles, pain and occasional self-doubt, which can make their achievements all the more remarkable, impressive, and inspiring.

Meyer offered her own youth as an example. She wasn't diagnosed as deaf until she entered elementary school. She completed college without an interpreter, subsequently earning a graduate degree. And yet she was fired from her first job solely because she was deaf—even though she was ranked second overall in sales.

Meyer said 70 percent of working-age Americans with disabilities are unemployed, despite possessing a wide range of skills, knowledge and talents, as well as demonstrable experience at overcoming challenges. In her talk, Meyer cited a disabled accountant she interviewed for a news profile who went on more than 200 interviews before landing a job.

"Karen was able to convey the frustration that deaf individuals have when trying to enter the work force," said Ryan Gibson, a Commercial Airplanes design engineer who has a hearing disability. "So many deaf people lose

the potential to show off their talents, skills and perspectives of the world around them and within their field simply because of the communication barrier. The good news is that there is a wealth of technology and services available to overcome that barrier."

Finally, Meyer reminded "TABs"—or Temporarily Abled Bodies, as some call people without disabilities—to recognize that men and women of all backgrounds have the potential to make profound contributions to Boeing, as well as the world's economy—and society.

"Don't be afraid to talk to us or ask us any question," counseled Boeing's Sykes, who is wheelchair-bound. "The only dumb question is one that's not asked. How else are you going to learn?"

—Geoff Potter

Pick a topic

This year's Global Diversity and EEO Compliance Summit offered attendees 26 workshops and 10 panel discussions as well as executive and guest speaker presentations. Here's a sample of the selections.

- Generational Diversity and its Impact to Boeing
- Mentoring Strategies: Creating Inclusion and Equity
- Supplier Diversity: Working Together
- The Polished Professional in the Global Arena
- Addressing Workplace Issues Fairly & Equitably
- Critical Thinking & Decision Making
- Diversity and Inclusion: The Competitive Advantage
- Mindful Matters: Inclusion Begins with Knowledge
- Using GlobeSmart to Understand International Cultural Differences
- Winning Communication Strategies for Cross-Cultural Teams