

Attracting Black Talent with Emma Philips, Partner, LocalGlobe

If you're a responsible business, one that values creativity, innovation and empathy, diversity will already be core to your long-term plans, even if you're not at the level you'd like. Long before the Black Lives Matter movement hit global headlines, having a more diverse team has repeatedly been found to boost business.

The innovation gains, alone, have been found to increase revenue by a fifth, and greater representation in one area can have a positive, knock-on effect to representation in other areas of the business.

We're not here to discuss these explicit benefits, though. It's widely accepted diversity is a major force for good. The focus of this is, instead, to look at what we need to do to achieve these benefits. How, as founders and teams across the tech and investment ecosystem, we can hire Black talent more effectively, based on real-world experiences and advice from our portfolio companies such as Faculty, Lingumi, Rekki, and nPlan, as well as Kwaku Nortey.

Positive discrimination vs positive action

The argument that is often made when looking to diversify teams is one about positive discrimination. Giving someone a job role because of the colour of their skin or gender, as opposed to basing it on their ability.

Yet, while companies may be criticised for this, positive discrimination is illegal within the UK. Employers can choose to hire candidates from underrepresented groups only as long as they are as qualified for a given role as all other candidates. Something known as positive action. No organisation needs to compromise on the quality of their talent when recruiting Black people or other underrepresented groups. They just need to take the time to learn how and where to attract a quality pipeline. The below resources are there to set you up for success.

Step 1. Create a space for discussion

Let's be frank – discussing diversity makes some people, particularly white people, uncomfortable. They can be plagued with the fear they'll say or do the wrong thing, and this inhibits their ability to take action on the issue.

A solution is to foster an environment that allows your team to feel comfortable talking about diversity. Do not put the responsibility of diversity and inclusion on an individual Black employee within your organisation, though. Leadership comes from the top down, and needs to be a priority of all members of the organisation.

Step 2. Set diversity goals

Where you are today is your starting point, and you need to admit honestly what that starting point is. Chances are, you're not fully representative, yet. But don't just set targets for target's sake. Establish what they are, and more importantly why you've set them, as well as how you'll measure progress.

If you're a company in London, for instance, does your team represent London's Census data? This means at least 13% of your workforce should come from Black ethnic groups.

Ensure these goals are agreed and communicated with all internal managers, and external recruitment firms. Have your team members take ownership of hitting these targets and have recruiters practice the pitch with you and your team before they go out to potential candidates.

Measuring the percentage of Black candidates at the top of your hiring funnel isn't an easy task, and candidates may not like stating their diversity up front in an application for fear that it may be used against them. One way to avoid this is to send a follow-up email, post-application to say "We really care about diversity and inclusion at our organisation, and would love it if you could take a minute to complete this anonymous diversity survey". That way you can still collect data on the diversity, without making people feel they will translate into positive/negative bias.

Step 3. Build a brand that speaks to the very best talent

When candidates are exploring job opportunities, they'll look at your website, your social media channels, articles about your company, and other online resources. You need a brand that showcases that talent from all walks of life is wanted and welcomed, and one that highlights the values and the culture you offer.

This doesn't just need to focus on race or gender issues. It can be done by promoting customer wins, new market launches, funding rounds, recent hires and so on, on LinkedIn, Twitter, through PR, and elsewhere. If you look like you're achieving milestones and hiring great talent, it makes you an attractive place to work, which will help you attract the best talent from all groups, regardless of age, gender, orientation or ethnicity.

This extends to job ads. Before going live with a job ad, audit it with people from different backgrounds, different ages, different sexes, by having them read through to ensure the wording speaks to them. You want to avoid using language that is targeted towards one specific demographic, while also stressing the importance of diversity within your organisation.

Tools like [Applied](#) can also help make sure your job ads aren't biased towards one set of candidates over another.

A phrase such as: "Company XY is an equal opportunity employer. We value diversity. We do not discriminate on the basis of colour, race, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, veteran status, or disability status." can go a long way. As can encouraging people to apply for roles they may be hesitant about with a comment such as "Feel free to apply even if you feel unsure about whether you meet every single requirement in this posting. As long as you're a quick learner, and are excited about changing the x,y,z, we're happy to support you as you come up to speed."

Step 4. Post your job ads on targeted job boards

In addition to platforms such as LinkedIn, Twitter and [Otta](#), there are Black ethnicity-focused job boards that can be a great place to post your jobs ads in a much more targeted way. Below are some recommended sites to look at:

If there are other great Black focused job boards (or hiring resources) we are missing and need to be added to the list, please let us know [here](#)!

Step 5. Encourage your team to recommend great talent

Most people have networks with similar backgrounds to themselves. Whether you have an employee referral programme or not, having an open forum where you discuss and educate your teams on diversity will keep the topic front of mind for your employees. Use this momentum to encourage your team to refer a diverse set of candidates from their networks and share job posts in relevant community channels.

Attracting the very best Black talent should be treated the same as attracting the very best talent – harnessing a culture of inclusivity that speaks to everyone.

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