

## **If You Have Time To Read Only One Book About Diversity Before Your Next Meeting**

A Review of:

### **7 KEYS 2 SUCCESS**

By Rosalyn Taylor O'Neale (Llumina Press: 2005)

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After three decades of studying and working in the fields of race relations and diversity, I think I've read most of the so-called seminal texts in the fields ... or at least skimmed them. Early works delineated the overt and subtle impact of racism and implored the reader to confront interpersonal acts of inequity, stand up for equal access and equal employment and work with allies to influence "social justice legislation." These books appropriately reflected the challenges of the 1960's. The affronts were often very personal. Individuals were denied entrance to schools, housing and eating facilities, not only as a consequence of carefully worded discriminatory regulations, but as the result of individual acts of racism. I and many of my colleagues, wanted books that reflected our outrage and spoke to strategies aimed not only at legislative change, but that offered assistance in navigating tense interactions with insensitive individuals and confronting acts of inequity.

Although racial and gender inequities remained a part of the fabric of America, publications of the 80's and 90's reflected the shifting immigration patterns in America, the growing desire on the part of employees to express their heterogeneity and the growth of technology. The focus was organizational and the challenge was how to meld the similarities and differences of this new workforce into viable and profitable businesses. The field of "diversity" was beginning to get a full head of steam. For the most part, diversity books published during this period promulgated strategies aimed at *augmenting* the basic core business processes of a company. They offered approaches that *added something* to the way the *real business* of an organization was conducted. They seldom modified core business functions. There might be, for example, a "women's initiative" or a "minority hiring initiative." Often these texts fell short of their purported utility in helping to truly change companies ... to make them more diverse and inclusive organizations. Their suggestions were usually too general and rarely impacted the fundamental work processes of the organization. Lest I sound too critical, keep in mind that the field of "organizational diversity," as we know it, is less than 50 years old; although, in recent years, publications have begun to change. Authors, be they researchers, diversity practitioners or corporate executives, now acknowledge the fact that inclusive work environments are workplaces that truly integrate a set of beliefs and behaviors into the very way that they do business. Rosalyn Taylor O'Neale's book delineates those beliefs and practices and provides viable strategies for their integration into the very structure of an organization.

**7 Keys 2 Success** is an important diversity text for beginning diversity practitioners, employees at all levels and can serve as a clear roadmap for senior executives and CEO's. How can one book serve such diverse audiences? Well, at the risk of seeming caught up in the numerical nature of the book's title, let me describe **three** criteria that I feel are critical to "diversity books" appealing to a wide audience: *clarity of presentation of ideas, relevant examples, and grounding in sound theory and/or research*. This text is right on the mark on all three criteria!

I must admit that when I first saw the title and then read the Preface, I thought that this might be another one of those books where the author takes us on a "passionate personal journey," the type of experiential journey that only the author and her close friends can appreciate. I was wrong! O'Neale begins with clear definitions, not a vague sentence or two, but eleven clearly stated descriptions; the kind of definitions that prove useful as the 7 Keys unfold, chapter by chapter. For example, the distinction between "diversity" and "visible diversity" and "inclusion" is both interesting and intriguing. "Inclusion" is defined as *both*, "... the addition of something or someone to, or the presence of somebody or something in a group or mixture" and as a process, "...practices that actively and passively encourage and allow individuals and groups to contribute, to have a say and to help direct the efforts of a team, group or organization."

Some of the Keys are ideas, others are strategies, most of them leave you stimulated and thinking about ways that they might be applied to your organizations. For example, the chapter, "Key #5: Measurements," introduces the 7 Keys Scorecard®. In addition to the usual measurement of hires and promotions, O'Neale provides an interesting and useful description of additional metrics. I won't give them away. You'll have to read the book.

Throughout the text, O'Neale utilizes various types of examples to make her points. Sometimes they are brief case studies that have just enough detail to leave room for application to your unique company or organization, other times they take the form of fictional, but highly believable work styles or philosophies. For example, in the Leadership Chapter (Key #2), we follow Phillip and Victor as their differing leadership styles contribute to different outcomes. One learns the value of "emotional intelligence quotient (EQ)" and its impact on the creation of a diverse and inclusive environment. O'Neale does not discount intelligence (IQ) as measured by the Simon-Binet Scale or the SAT, but rather provides a rationale for the added value of emotional intelligence in the decision making process.

Being a relatively young field, organizational diversity has not yet accumulated a well developed body of research of its own. In spite of this, O'Neale provides ample research from the social sciences, as well as from the fields of management and psychology to bolster her points. Although she emphasizes the importance of passion and commitment, no one should think that this is a light-weight book simply imploring leaders to be sensitive and kind. Her suggested approach is structured and data driven. It is a book that is easy to read, written in a very engaging style and is packed with descriptions of structured interventions backed by sound research and years of professional experience.

Not only does **7 Keys 2 Success** meet my three criteria for a useful "diversity book," but when students, colleagues and senior executives ask me what's the *latest must-read book on diversity* ... before their next meeting, I have an answer.