



Stanford eCorner

The Advantage of Diversity

Joseph DeSimone, *Carbon3D, Inc.*

October 12, 2016

Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/4619/The-Advantage-of-Diversity>

Carbon 3D, Inc. Co-Founder and CEO Joseph DeSimone insists businesses must be intentional about achieving diversity because it can drive innovation just as much as people's talents. He also discusses how a lack of cognitive diversity among team members can serve as a structural disadvantage. "We learn the most from those that we have the least in common with," DeSimone says.



Transcript

- [Joseph] When you gather people around, and one of the core cultural values for us at Carbon is that when you are working with a diverse set of people, that there's going to be a need to be clear about not only what you know, but what you don't know. And there's a vulnerable trust that one has to have if you're going to be clear to your colleagues about what you don't know. And that's a critical characteristic value that we have at Carbon. Let me expand this a little bit further. When I started my academic career, in the early 1990's, I got a chance to be invited to an innovation committee or workshop at a very large chemical firm. And I flew outside the United States to get there. And I walked into this innovation group, and it was a pretty sterile looking board room like this. But what was really amazing to me was not only was it all white guys around the table, but they all graduated from the same two research groups. Right? And you know what I mean when I say that. Everybody knew each other, Everybody knew what each other knew, and I felt like a Martian coming into this environment.

And I never felt more like an outsider than when I walked into that room. And it dawned on me right then and there, that this group was at a structural disadvantage. The way they were organized to drive innovation. And, you know, a lot of people have talked about this where the recognition of diversity is a fundamental tenet of innovation. I talked a little bit about disciplinary diversity in the beginning, but diversity more broadly defined, and in recognizing that diversity plays a really important role, it doesn't always trump ability, but it does so far more often than we expect. In this really great book by Scott Page called "The Difference". What I find intriguing, in a lot of different sectors of our society and our organizations, that once you start talking about diversity, and the role that it has on driving innovation, that very quickly people will come up and start talking about ability. The meritocracy. And there's often a very quick pivot that says that the meritocracy is really the driver and should we be giving up the meritocracy? Clearly, no. Ability matters.

No question about it. But the point is, so does diversity. They're different topics. They're absolutely different topics. Nothing is more impactful than a diverse set of individuals driving toward a common goal to make a difference. And it's this experiential diversity that's really important. Recognizing early on that we learn the most from those that we have the least in common with. Right? And you think about that. If you're part of a design team, and you're fortunate to be part of a design team, you recognize that these different experiences drive the innovation process. I can tell you more times than not, different design teams I've been associated with, if somebody grew up with not much money, they think about problem solving fundamentally different than somebody that grew up with a lot of money.

Not that one is better than the other. They're just different. And if your goal is to broaden the perspectives around the table, then you have to think about this diversity, this element of diversity, to drive innovation. And recognizing that some of the most innovative solutions comes from embracing that diversity of perspective. And so, my sort of message here is, I think we need to be intentional about this diversity. Or you're going to lose out. It's really the secret sauce of a lot of different companies,

especially those companies that are trying to drive something very profoundly different. And diversity is a recognized fundamental tenet of innovation.