

Opening Discussion Summary⁵

At the 2006 National Employer Summit: *Raising Profits and Potential: Return on Investment for Work-life Effectiveness, Diversity, Workplace Equity*, attendees represented four groups: researchers, policymakers, workingwomen, and employers. The Summit highlighted key themes of workplace equity, work-life effectiveness, and diversity. Prior to breaking into small groups, a leadership breakfast was held to provide participants with an overview of promising practices and public policy areas that might impact work-life effectiveness, workplace equity, and diversity.

The leadership breakfast was moderated by Lisa Hershman, Global Vice-President of Operational Excellence and Quality of Avnet, Inc., and featured Muriel Watkins, Vice President of Human Resources for The New York Times, and Dr. Toni-Michelle Travis, political analyst and associate professor at George Mason University. The leadership breakfast provided insights and examples on the two predominant schools of thought on the implementation of workplace change: 1) the dissemination and adoption of voluntary workplace practices and 2) the development of public policies. Watkins provided hands-on examples of promising voluntary company practices from The New York Times, and Travis offered an overview of what participants could expect from the (then) new Congress, a group with the power to create legislation affecting thousands of employers and millions of employees.

Watkins shared significant elements of The Times' diversity initiative. She admonished the audience to "champion" diversity and noted that her company deliberately changed their internal language to reflect their emphasis on the active work of championing diversity rather than the more passive assertion to simply embrace diversity. She also shared what The Times refers to as its burning platform—those factors that make a diverse workforce critical. The platform includes shifting demographics; a multi-generational workforce, competition for talent; labor shortages; and globalization. The factors also mirror those identified by BPW Foundation prior to its 2005 Summit as forces shaping workforces and workplaces⁶.

In terms of work-life policies, the Times has an informal, voluntary policy which complements their overall diversity strategy. Guidelines are set by management, who then provide opportunities for discussions. "We do not require, nor do we wish to know, the reason for the request...all have merit, and we don't feel we should judge the importance," stated Watkins.

Travis then addressed the question of what might workingwomen and employers expect from the new Congress, especially how its members might deal with the issues to be discussed during the Summit: work-life effectiveness, workplace equity, and diversity. Many of her forecasts have borne fruit since the 2006 Summit.

First, she gave an overview of policy creation and the importance of committees at the federal level. "The Speaker of the House shapes the legislative agenda.... We should also expect increased activity with special interest groups representing labor, AARP, and women," she said.

Travis further outlined an abrupt shift in social issues and values including: increased scrutiny of defense, military, and government contracting; attention to minimum wage and education and a shift in the "business friendly" quotient of committee chairs. After the 2006 Summit, minimum wage, wage equity, and education received greater attention on the Hill with hearings held relating to issues explored during the Summit (i.e. equity) as well as legislation under development. Minimum wage and education issues received major attention as part of the "The First 100 Days" priorities set by the new Democrat-led Congress.

Although, in general, many of the forecasts made by Travis related to more attention being paid to issues impacting women, diversity and equality, she cautioned that a possible outcome for the new Congress might be increased deadlock between the House and Senate.

After hearing from the breakfast speakers and while still in the large group setting, participants were invited to share information about their organizations. This exercise provided BPW Foundation with a cross section of the priorities of what the four different groups—researchers, policymakers, workingwomen, and employers—wanted to achieve during the Summit.

⁵ "Raising Profits and Potential." BusinessWomen (BW) Magazine. Winter 2007. Summaries of the opening discussion can also be found in the Winter 2007 edition of BW Magazine. <www.bpwusa.org>

⁶ Resources and Policy Changes Needed to Create Successful Workplaces. BPW Foundation. April 2006. <<http://www.bpwusa.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=4944>>

“We have to provide venues for discussion between various groups,” explained a BPW Foundation representative. “They all play an important role in helping identify those common ground areas ripe for action.”

A brief sample of comments from participants follows:

A representative from the *U.S. Department of Labor* remarked that she was “here to speak and share.” She informed the other participants of the Department’s resources such as data on the needs of employees of different generations and phases of employment.

The Choose 2 Lead Foundation, which also participated in BPW Foundation sponsored workshops at the 2006 BPW/USA National Conference, was interested in learning more about how to retain highly skilled women. This topic was also addressed at *Workplaces and Workforces in Transition*, the 2005 Summit, and disseminated in a final report to researchers, policymakers, and the media.

Worklife Performance wanted to know, what are the challenges voiced by employers? “That’s why I’m here. ... It has to make sense for the bottom line.” This concern is common in the business community and is one that BPW Foundation repeatedly hears; hence the theme for the 2006 Summit.

Corporate Voices for Working Families came to share new research on the impact of work-life flexibility policies on lower-wage workers and the benefits of workplace flexibility for employers. Representatives served as table hosts for the work-life flexibility discussion.

Discovery Communications, Inc. sought information on how to build a business case for work-life policies and to learn how to establish trainings for management across the organization.

YMCA- Orange County was already employing informal flexibility policies and wanted to learn from about formal and for-profit models. YMCA has an “in-and-out” policy that has helped cultivate creativity among employees and provides a break in the day, said a YMCA representative. Examples included leaving mid-afternoon for school pick up or school meetings during the day. Although nonprofit cultures can be different from their for-profit counterparts, work-life issues still impact work and productivity, it was explained.

National Council on Independent Living is an organization that works on behalf of people with disabilities and came to learn what policies and practices might better engage those with disabilities in the workplace.

The New York Times representatives explained that their employer leads by doing; management tasks a staff person to lead work-life policy and flexibility initiatives in order to jump start the inclusion of work-life in the corporate culture. As one of the event’s opening speakers, Watkins, shared The New York Times’ “Rules for the Road” for developing diverse, flexible workplaces.

After the large group discussion, participants then moved into the table or small group discussion phase of the Summit.



Muriel Watkins, Vice President of Human Resources for The New York Times, shared promising practices for diversity initiatives during the morning Leadership Breakfast. Ms. Watkins joined the BPW Foundation board in March 2007.

The New York Times’ Rules of the Road⁷

“Achieving financial and journalistic success at The New York Times requires that we take personal responsibility for closely adhering to the following tenets of behavior: • Be stewards of our Company’s brand reputation and assets • Treat each other with honesty, respect, and civility • Uphold the highest journalistic, business, and personal ethics • Keep a relentless focus on serving our customers • Innovate to reach our full competitive potential • Execute with urgency, agility, and excellence • Champion diversity • Collaborate to harness our collective strengths • Achieve results by challenging yourself and mentoring others • Maintain perspective and a sense of humor”

⁷ “The New York Times Company Journalism Ethics Policy.” 2005. <<http://www.nytco.com/company-journalism-ethics.html#standards>>