

## Study says biases are costing companies billions

By *PURVA PATEL*



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Being compared to a terrorist.

Being asked to attend recruiting events and be the company's face of diversity.

Being asked unwelcome questions about skin or ethnic attire.

These were some of the biases that workers who have left the corporate work force experienced, according to a study conducted by San Francisco's Level Playing Field Institute. The study included a survey of 1,700 people conducted in January.

Freda Kapur Klein, founder of the institute, presented the findings Friday at the National Society of Hispanic MBAs conference and job fair.

Organizers said more than 8,000 attended and about 300 companies had booths at the George R. Brown Convention Center.

About 2 million professionals reportedly quit their jobs each year because they were treated unfairly at work. The economic costs to U.S. companies amount to \$64 billion a year, not including costs to a company's reputation among potential employees and customers.

At a time when companies seem to be making a bigger effort than ever to create diverse work forces, such hidden barriers, often unintentional slights, still distort the playing field for minorities.

While the reasons for leaving vary, they signal that companies still struggle to retain a major part of their work forces.

Often minority employees still find a disconnect between what a company sells itself as and what it actually is, Klein said.

"I think we have made progress, but the expectations have also changed," she said.

Companies talk about valuing diversity, but employee expectations are also rising. Unless a company is prepared to meet those expectations, it shouldn't make a show of its focus on minority recruitment.

One law firm she studied recruited lawyers by touting its commitment to diversity and family life. Another firm told workers about its rigorous hours and how its commitment to clients comes before personal lives, even if it means postponing a wedding.

The level of morale at the second firm was higher, she said, because it was honest.

David Franco, who works for a local energy company and attended the conference, agreed that companies need to look harder at their approach to diversity.

"Companies come to conferences like this and at the booth are Hispanics or blacks, but the company doesn't look like that," he said. "They're trying, but hopefully we can go back and say, 'Your heart's in the right place, but you need to go one step further.' "

So what should companies do? According to the study, when asked what their employers could have done to make them stay, white, heterosexual men and women said better pay would have kept them there.

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender professionals would have liked better benefits, and people of color would have liked better managers who recognized their abilities.

"It's really pretty simple," Klein said.

[purva.patel@chron.com](mailto:purva.patel@chron.com)

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