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Current News

Companies Fail To See Value of Minority, Women Scientists

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May 12, 2006, 12:30

PITTSBURGH

Chief executive officers of the country's 100 fastest-growing science and technology companies fear international companies will gain a competitive advantage if they have access to the U.S.'s best scientists and technical workers, according to a survey released this week.

And yet, the feared drain on manpower has not prompted the CEOs to recruit, hire and nurture minorities and women, who are woefully under-represented in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) fields.

In fact, 74 percent of CEOs are "not frustrated" by their company's inability to hire Blacks, Hispanics, American Indians and women, according to the survey commissioned by the Bayer Corp. Although 83 percent say STEM companies have a role in ensuring that minorities and women succeed in science and engineering, only one in five have specific recruitment programs targeted at minorities and women.

The pool of women and under-represented minorities in the STEM industry is not being adequately tapped because of a dubious mental image of what scientists, mathematicians and engineers should look like, says Dr. Mae Jemison, the nation's first Black female astronaut and CEO of BioSentient Inc, an emerging medical devices company.

That image: A White male.

"A good proportion (of CEOs) have not yet fully made the connection between the potential STEM manpower shortage issue and the potential untapped talent pool that exists in those individuals who are still not well represented in these fields," Jemison told *Diverse*. "They don't visualize (minorities and women, who make up) more than 50 percent of the population as their potential workforce."

Furthermore, this image has manifested itself negatively among college faculty, Jemison adds, leading to poor treatment and higher drop-out rates for women and underrepresented minorities in STEM programs.

"The professors don't really see women or people of color as their future colleagues," says Jemison, who has been a professor at Dartmouth College and Cornell University.

Despite the dearth of minorities and women, two-thirds of the CEOs surveyed said neither their companies nor their employees participate in pre-college education programs designed to generate minority students' interest in math and science, according to the survey, the "Bayer Facts of Science Education XII: CEOs on STEM Diversity: The Need, The Seed, The Feed."

"What we're seeing here is that there is a tremendous opportunity on the part of STEM companies to get involved in a variety of ways with today's students and their STEM education," says Dr. Attila Molnar, president and CEO of the Pittsburgh-based Bayer Corp.

“Whether it’s initiating outreach with them and beginning a dialogue about the need for them in these fields, providing role models and mentors, or actively supporting education programs that have a track record of success with girls and minorities — the opportunity is certainly there.”

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