

Argyle Conversations

by Argyle Executive ForumSM

Attracting the New Generation

Linal Harris, Chief Diversity Officer for U.S. Cellular Corp. discussed the importance of attracting the best workers from Generation Y and how to keep your workforce productive and engaged.

Katheryn Sillo: You are not only the Chief Diversity Officer but also a CEO and life coach. How does your experience as a life coach impact your position at U.S. Cellular?

Linal Harris: It serves as a phenomenal platform for leadership at the executive level. It's about taking an individual or a group from point A to point B by identifying a solution for the gap, so you can create sustainable, positive change. As a life coach I've been taught to really understand behaviorally why human beings function and make decisions and how those decisions can serve us, but also be a disservice to us. It's also an opportunity for me to just show up as a really good role model and leader from a coaching perspective.

Having a life coach certification makes my job so much easier, because life coaches are also trained to understand conversation and storytelling from context. To me it's a beautiful partnership with diversity, because everybody has a story and a culture; everybody comes from a different type of background. I think one of the biggest misses with many leaders is really understanding and identifying the story that someone's telling us, not just in what they say but also in their behavior. There is content and context in this story that, as a leader, I can take a look at in a very different way to get to the core root of whatever needs to be addressed.

What are some of the ways U.S. Cellular is working to create jobs for millennials entering the workplace?

We've put a lot of effort in our internship programs, and in the last three to five years we've done more around internships than we've ever done as an organization. Our internship program gets us on the map with the millennials or Generation Y as an employer of choice, and it also creates a doorway that we can use to attract and retain young talent in the workplace.

We also just hired a new advertising firm for recruitment, and one of the things that I'm going to be heavily focused on with this new firm is diversity in regards to our recruitment brand. In the future, when acquiring new talent and working to retain that talent, the primary lens of what we typically look at is not just going to be race and gender, but rather all the aspects of diversity, like sexual orientation, age and especially Gen Y.

Do you feel that having insights from interns is crucial for the development of the company?

It has been documented, that most of the innovation we see is now coming from Generation Y. So, the question becomes, how can we support and attract this new generation? I would say that it's through development, mentorship and sponsorship, and then making sure that we have inclusive environments so they can be heard and have a platform with which to inform us of what we can change. That's what we do with that internship program. We made sure that it wasn't just about getting a job for the summer, but about what would they do differently as an associate of the company, while combining the expertise they brought with the new knowledge they acquired in their internship role?

So based on that, we asked each intern, "What would you change? What would you do differently?" Then we listened to them and implemented portions of their advice that we could change and act on fairly easily. As we do more of this and create testimonials with these interns, I believe this will open the door to creating a much more attractive environment for young workers at U.S. Cellular.

What are you doing especially with internal branding?

I think one of the big mistakes organizations make is once they acquire new talent, they don't tell the new talent why the company is a cool place to work and build a career. The days of working for a paycheck and being satisfied with that are over. Young people want to be tied to some type of cause, and they want to be aligned with an organization that is making a difference in the world. This is one of the mantras of the Millennials/Generation Y. So, what is our cause at U.S. Cellular, what are we doing in the community? What is it that we're up to in the world that make it so our associates can be really proud of the organization they work for?

The work I am leading with internal branding will be targeted at answering these questions for our associates. People want to work for a company where if they say the name, others will go, "Wow, how cool is it to work there? They're up to some great things."

BIOS:

Linal Harris

Linal Harris is an international business professional, Fortune 500 company executive, writer, speaker, entrepreneur, radio host and life coach. He is also the recipient of a number of honors and awards, such as the Chicago Urban Roundtable's 2012, 40 Game Changers under 40 award and The Chicago Defender's 2013, Men of Excellence award. He recently accepted the role of Chief Diversity Strategist for U.S. Cellular® and in this role he develops and oversees the diversity and community outreach strategies for the organization.

Previous to taking this role, Linal assisted in the start-up and management of multiple call centers across the globe with recent efforts in countries like Nicaragua, El Salvador and Jamaica. He has over 15 years of leadership, business operations and technology experience. He has held positions with a number of Fortune 500 companies, both domestic and international.

Chicago is home or Linal and he has a strong passion for inspirational leadership and outreach within his community.

Linal's passion for leadership is evidenced in his blog <http://inspirationalperspective.com> where he challenges his readers to murder mediocrity and live their best life possible. Linal continually shares his resources and time with inner city youth by volunteering and inspiring high school juniors and seniors to pursue further education.

Katheryn Sillo

Katheryn Sillo is a part of the Content and Programming team at Argyle Executive Forum. In this role, Katheryn works on content development and speaker recruitment for events, specializing in the Human Resources space. Additionally, Katheryn oversees the content platform, Argyle Journal. She holds a Bachelor's degree in English with a concentration in Journalism and minor in Political Science from Fairfield University, where she was captain of the Division I Rowing Team and on the executive cabinet for the Fairfield University Student Association.