

ASK THE COACH

TACKLING DIVERSITY IN THE iGAMING INDUSTRY

Marion Gamel is a C-level executive with over 20 years of experience. Having started her career as an entrepreneur, she then worked for Google and Eventbrite and was Chief Marketing Officer of Betsson Group. Marion has been coaching entrepreneurs, founders and C-executives around the world since 2015. In this regular column, she provides advice to business leaders to empower them on issues ranging from improving efficiency to driving transformation and international growth within the company.

Diversity is a hot topic for companies in gaming and beyond. While many leaders are concerned about diversity, it means different things to different people. Sadly, some companies only tackle diversity in a superficial way, giving it a bad name because embracing it like they do yields no real benefit.

There's no tiptoeing around the fact that gaming is not a leading industry when it comes to diversity. Why is that?



WHAT DIVERSITY IS NOT

Diversity is often reduced to gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation, which is tempting as it couldn't be easier to implement: reporting on the number of women or nationalities, hanging a rainbow-coloured banner in the canteen. But what is this really achieving?

GENDER

In my 20+ years career, I have seen equal percentage of efficient, hard working and innovative men and women. I have heard all sorts of "truths" about women in the workplace that I find patronising to women and disrespectful to men. Not all women think more long-term! Not all women are highly collaborative! People are multifaceted and complex, summarising their attributes to their gender is shockingly reductive.

What companies need is better contributors and leaders regardless of gender. When focusing on gender, it's easy to cut corners: I see many →

← companies in gaming “improve” their gender diversity results by hiring a female Chief of HR or Chief Marketing Officer, departments where the percentage of women is naturally higher. Such companies wouldn’t attempt to appoint a woman Chief of Engineering or Chief Commercial Officer. Too hard to find.

My advice when it comes to gender diversity is twofold: first, ignore gender completely when it’s time to hire; take names off CVs if you have to. Focus on skills, capabilities and values. Let the best win. Second, level the playing field by being as generous with paternity leave as you are with maternity leave.

ETHNICITY

Ethnic diversity often is a politically correct metric that enables companies to camouflage the fact that most of their Asian employees are cleaners and the only person of African origin is the handyman.

In all fairness to companies, minorities in the workplace reflect the chances that society gives immigrants today. If no coloured immigrant gets a chance to study at the University, then it’ll be next to impossible to hire a black accountant. It’s as simple as that. So before claiming that your company’s minority ratio is “strong” or “weak”, put it into context in your region or industry.

If a company really wants to make a difference and welcome minorities in the corporate world, a solution is to put in place an apprenticeship programme that gives a real chance to all. You’ll soon realise that people who deserve a better chance come in all shades.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

I have never understood why we need to discuss or even know the sexual preferences of employees. To me, it’s 100 per cent private and, once capabilities have been assessed, I don’t need to know more. If an employee shows up at work dressed like Elton John on tour, there’s a dress code issue, not a sexual orientation one. Sponsoring the local Gay Pride is the equivalent to putting a plaster on an infection – it doesn’t change the attitude of the few hardcore homophobes in the office who’ll continue to discriminate against any behaviour they deem “suspicious”. Companies don’t need to celebrate LGBT members; they need to implement a zero-tolerance policy on homophobes.



WHAT DIVERSITY IS

Diversity is having a healthy variety of ways of thinking: prioritising topics, assessing opportunities and risks, dealing with crises, envisioning the future and questioning the status quo. Diversity of thoughts is what I look for when leaders I coach want to move the needle. I don’t ask how many women they have on their board or how many minorities they have among their workforce.

Here’s what gaming companies can look for when they set their heart at bringing diversity to their leadership and workforce.

AMBITION VERSUS STABILITY

It is indeed wonderful to work with ambitious professionals who push boundaries for the company and for themselves. As ambition turned into a virtue a few decades ago, companies today tend to forget that some people who want to ‘stay put’ are immensely valuable. If everyone in your company wants to be the next CEO, 99 per cent of your workforce will be disappointed and leave within a couple of years. While Google focused for years on “shooting stars”, Apple equally rewarded “rock stars”: people who are amazing at what they do and happy to stay where they are. A company needs both “shooting stars” and “rock stars” and attracting only one kind of profile would be a massive oversight.

ACADEMIC EDUCATION VERSUS STREET-WISDOM

Among successful entrepreneurs and leaders, there are people who have high academic diplomas and people who have never benefited from secondary education. We’ve all seen colleagues with shiny elite-school degrees slowly rot in a dull job as well as leaders who have reached their intellectual limits. What does this tell us? We need a bit of both in any company. I would therefore encourage leaders to value equally a university diploma as five years spent defending your country; to rate a PhD as highly as having reached Olympic-level in sports. Resilience, for instance, a much needed attribute in times of flux, is a character trait; it cannot be taught at school. →

◀ INDUSTRY BACKGROUND

The question of industry experience is predominant in gaming where many companies seek candidates with gaming experience. However, when it comes down to excellence, sometimes the best talent comes from outside our industry. Companies must decide which roles should be filled by individuals who know the industry and the product inside-out and which roles will be better filled by specialists who have learned their trade from the best, be it FMCGs, tech or other heavily regulated industries. In a fast changing environment, companies equally need people who know the past and people who've been exposed to the future.

DISABILITIES

There is a group of people that is largely untapped when it comes to recruiting a diverse workforce: the disabled. Given similar education or experience, I would not hesitate to give a chance to someone who has had a much more challenging journey due to a disability. Disabilities are not commonly taken into consideration when it comes to hiring. Yet, consider the benefits of having an engineer who is not only brilliant but who also had to navigate a career with autism. Imagine the added value a legal mind can bring, if this person has had to navigate the world in a wheelchair. When it comes to real diversity of thoughts, disabled talent represents an untapped wealth of resilience, courage and agility.

GETTING STARTED

Tackling diversity solely to comply with the zeitgeist means it's rarely well executed because following a trend is not a strong enough motivation to invest substantial efforts or funds. Diversity cannot be seen as a box to tick; it means deep transformation in an organisation.

Indeed, it is first and foremost about having the foresight and courage to make changes and welcome a wider range of employee profiles and backgrounds to impact the way business is conducted.

The first step for diversity to become a reality is to understand what is tangibly at stake for the company in the mid to long run. I often ask leaders I coach questions such as: what could diversity change, grow or improve? Which recent business drawbacks could have been impacted by diversity? For diversity to become a reality, leaders must first understand how it impacts revenue and share price, the metrics that matter most.

In order to define the opportunities that diversity represents and the shape it must take in your company, gather data from studies and examples from other companies outside of your geographical area or industry, study aspirational case studies, then create your unique version of diversity that will fuel the growth of your business. igC

Got a question for Marion? Email her on marion.gamel@gmail.com

