

Jobs In America

Using A Football Rule To Create Employment Opportunities

(NAPSA)—How many good jobs America can provide may depend, according to one ingenious theory, on how close the country can come to following the National Football League's (NFL) successful attempt at increasing diversity.

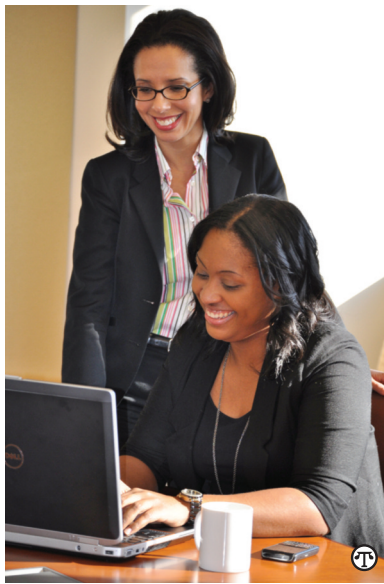
The NFL's Rooney Rule requires the 32 teams to give fair interviews to qualified minority candidates whenever a head coaching or general manager position becomes available.

Since the Rooney Rule was adopted, the league has gone from three minority head coaches to eight minority coaches and five general managers and teams led by African-American coaches have competed in and won the Super Bowl, proving that minorities richly deserved those leadership positions.

What if CEOs and corporate boards took a page from the NFL owners' playbook and adopted a voluntary version of the Rooney Rule to level the playing field for minorities in corporate America? Robert L. Johnson, founder and chairman of The RLJ Companies and founder of Black Entertainment Television, proposes a similar RLJ Rule for business.

Demographic trends show that minorities are quickly becoming the largest employee pool and consumer base in the U.S. Unless corporate America reaches out and embraces this growing group, experts believe this nation cannot win in the global game of economic competition.

Although many companies have made a strong commitment to diversity over the years, minorities still lack access to business opportunities, he contends. As a result, the income gap, according to a Pew research study,



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has increased tenfold and the wealth gap between white Americans and African Americans over the last 20 years has increased from \$20,000 to \$90,000. Black unemployment stands at nearly 17 percent.

To reverse these trends, Johnson says, creative and voluntary business solutions are needed. His RLJ Rule is designed to encourage companies to establish a “best practices” policy of identifying minority candidates or vendors that are often overlooked under traditional hiring or procurement practices.

It suggests that companies (1) voluntarily implement a plan to interview a minimum of two qualified minority candidates for every job opening at the vice president level and above; and (2) interview

at least two qualified minority-owned firms for vendor or supplier contracts before choosing a winner.

The purpose of this voluntary rule is not to suggest quotas or require companies to hire any individual or minority, just to make certain that minorities are fairly and fully considered before any job opening or vendor opportunity is filled.

While this can be a way of ensuring fairness and equity in employment, many in corporate America may soon see diversity as a business imperative, no less important than financial performance, succession planning and shareholder relations.

To further address the issue of unemployment, especially within the African-American and minority communities, Johnson created an Internet-based jobs and opportunities site designed to aggregate minorities looking for jobs and minority small businesses seeking to do business with U.S. corporations. The idea behind OppsPlace, as it's called, is to create a successful business that minority professionals and minority companies will use to introduce themselves to corporate America and that corporate America will use to maximize diversity and inclusion.

“I see a need for more comprehensive solutions and am a firm believer that a lot more can be done to address the issue of unemployment, especially within the minority community,” Johnson explains.

This strategy, he believes, will show how talented African Americans, given the opportunity, can succeed at the highest levels, help ensure future success for many minority Americans and make this country better. For more information, visit www.OppsPlace.com.