

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EXERCISE: WRITE FOR FIVE MINUTES

Write in bullet points; use back if necessary.

A large financial services company with branches in Chicago, New York and Los Angeles analyzes its employment profile and finds that it has only 2% female representation in top managerial positions. Analysis of population distribution and education trends reveals that the company could easily have 25% female representation in these top positions. The company sets a 5 year goal of “full utilization” for women in these positions at 25% and creates a plan to help meet this goal.

The Affirmative Action plan includes proactive hiring strategies such as advertising open positions to organizations of women in business and financial services, visually portraying the company as diverse in gender, racial and age representation, and networking with female leaders and mentors in the corporate world.

When a top management position comes open, the search committee reviews the applicant pool of over a hundred applicants, and interviews six candidates (two women, four men). The committee selects two final candidates, one male and one female. Both candidates have earned MBAs from prestigious schools, have ten years experience in the field, and have excellent recommendations from supervisors. After a second round of interviews, the search committee deems them equally qualified. However, under the Affirmative Action plan, the company offers the open position to the female candidate, who then accepts the job.

The company informs the male candidate in a letter that, although he was not chosen for this position, his resume will be kept on file should another opening occur. The male candidate decides to sue the company on the basis of “reverse discrimination”; he claims that one’s sex should play no role in hiring decisions. Furthermore, in an interview with the press, he states that that he personally is not sexist so he should not have to miss a lucrative job opportunity because of the “sins of the past.”

Who do you side with in this case—the company or the male candidate? What issues about Affirmative Action are raised by this case?

Note: Since employment decisions are highly confidential, the only ones who know that preferential hiring played a role in this hiring are the members of the search committee. Neither applicant knows if preferential hiring was used in deciding upon the successful job candidate.

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