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## Setting goals, listening to employees builds strong workforce



The WorkForce Panel included (from left) moderator Emily Bowers, BEMA; Christy Pettey, Kwik Lok Corp.; Trina Bediako, New Horizons Baking Co.; Nathan Norris, Highland Baking Co.; and Pamela Clayborne, JLS Automation.

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By [Michelle Smith](#)

SAN DIEGO— Finding and keeping employees is challenging but critical for bakeries these days. A good place for companies to make improvements in workforce is figuring out where the company is and where it wants to go.

“We could decide to do things as we always have — and we won’t have anyone working on the lines,” Trina Bediako, chief executive officer at New Horizons Baking Co., Norwalk, Ohio, said at the BEMA Convention 2022 Workforce Panel. “So we had to take a look at not where we were but where we wanted to be and the workforce that was out there and what their needs were. For us that began with a reassessment of our values, our mission and our vision.”



The panel at the convention, held June 22-25, touched on recruitment, employee retention and engagement and the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). Others on the panel included Pamela Clayborne, chief people officer at JLS Automation; Nathan Norris, director of diversity, equity and inclusion at Highland Baking Co., Northbrook, Ill.; and Christy Pettey, chief people officer at Kwik Lok Corp. Emily Bowers, BEMA vice president, education and operations, moderated the panel.

Ms. Clayborne said it's crucial for all employees to be heard. JLS reached out to employees and asked them what the company is and is not doing well. The company also asked them to share what they had seen work well in other jobs.

"The response was incredible," she said. "They taught us so much, and from that we were able to drive into what we're calling our new horizon initiative, and it's literally changing the structure of our company. It's impressive what these employees have to share when you listen."

The panel discussed reaching out to diverse communities in order to find new employees, such as immigrants or those who may need a second chance. Ms. Pettey said it's important to use the right language to attract a wide range of people. For instance, women tend to shy away from jobs that use the term "rock star."

Kwik Lok also discovered that posting jobs and interviewing candidates in Spanish helped them find new employees in the Hispanic community.

"We translated our postings and got a ton of applicants, and then realized we didn't plan how to onboard," she said. "We went through that whole process of translating our hiring documentation, our orientation slides and even things like the work orders so that they know what to do."

DEI was another topic of discussion. Panelists talked about the importance of being intentional and having a top-to-bottom appreciation for and dedication to diversity.

"For us to be successful, we have to represent our employee base, our customer base and the world that we live in," Ms. Bediako said.

Mr. Norris explained that Highland reached out to employees first then built its DEI program from there.

"We started out with an employee climate survey, and we asked about diversity, equity and inclusion, how they felt about the management team, about 40 different questions," Mr. Norris said. "That's when we started building goals and initiatives and objectives to address some of the issues out of the feedback that we got. We started having monthly meetings to talk about diversity, equity and inclusion to keep everybody engaged, and it seems to be working out quite well."

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