What Executives and Managers Need to Learn from Chris Rock and Melissa Harris-Perry


Ms. Harris-Perry, who is also a professor at Wake Forest University, complained that she was being selectively preempted from her weekend show. During the messy break-up, MSNBC has responded that it was simply reorganizing during the presidential race, apparently, as a part of its pivot to increase the ratings that it was losing to Fox and CNN. Ironically, MSNBC supposedly denied Ms. Harris-Perry's request to host the show from the campaign trail, because, MSNBC claimed, there was a lack of resources, even though she teaches political science and has a PhD in the field.

Ms. Harris-Perry's show focused on politics and social justice, highlighting guests who rarely appeared elsewhere on cable news. She created controversy during her tenure at the network, notably during the last presidential campaign when she made a joke about a picture of the Romney clan with an adopted black grandchild in the shot. She later apologized for the remark.

While I have no inside information about the politics behind this whole brouhaha, I do think that the loss of a platform for so many guests who lacked a national media voice is unfortunate.
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What is the relevance of these kind of disputes for your organization? Consider whether there's a space for diverse voices in your group. Not just race but a diversity of opinions, disciplines, gender and other views. Before you make a move to reorganize, lay people off or hire, step back and look at the mix. The whole idea of diversity and inclusion is not only to do the right thing, but to create a rich tapestry of ideas and backgrounds in order to make your organization stronger.

Be careful about refusing applicants for their "fit", that illusive quality that cultures frequently use as a rationale for rejecting applicants or moving people out of the organization. Not only do the courts look askance at such excuses, you might end up the subject of a Chris Rock joke: "Is Hollywood racist? You're damn right Hollywood is racist. But it ain't that racist that you've grown accustomed to. Hollywood is sorority racist. It's like, we like you Rhonda, but you're not a Kappa."

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