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CONFERENCE AIMED AT BOOSTING BLACK BUSINESS TALENT DRAWS CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

Thousands of black job seekers and aspiring entrepreneurs are in Orlando this week to shake hands with decision makers at companies across the globe. The National Black MBA Association is wrapping up its week-long conference and career expo. In nearly four decades, the event has earned a reputation for connecting recruiters with black talent.

But that's changing. 90.7's Renata Sago went to the conference and spoke with members and partners who say they're adapting to the new face of the association, which is starting to look more and more like a mixed palette.

Here's her conversation with [90.7's All Things Considered](#) host Crystal Chavez.

CHAVEZ: So Renata, for those who aren't familiar with the National Black MBA Association, what is it, exactly?

SAGO: Well, it started in 1970 when a small group of black MBA students at the University of Chicago got together with some faculty and businessmen to host a two-day conference. The goal was to help black entrepreneurs support each other and expand their networks. Today, the group has 10,000 members across the country. And its mission is the same: to give black business folks training and access to opportunities.

CHAVEZ: Tell us more about the conference. This is its 37th year, right?

SAGO: Yes, the event lasts a week. There are workshops and a competition for small business ideas. The career expo is most popular. It draws about 8,000 attendees and over 200 companies that are looking to hire talent. In many cases, folks get hired on the spot.

I spoke with Roshae Darville, a first time attendee. She's in data analytics and did a lot of research on companies before coming.

She said, "For me, honestly, it's the networking and being around like-minded individuals that have done the same thing that I have and have the same type of vision. How many organizations can say that they have, you know, something to this magnitude for the African-American community?"

CHAVEZ: So, Renata, Roshae Darville is black. But the conference demographics are changing. You were there this week. What did you see?

SAGO: I saw a reflection of changing demographics in the United States. The association was 100% black when it was founded.

Today, 74% of the group's members are black; Asians make up 10% of the association; so do whites; and Latinos, 2%. The rest are unidentified.

When it comes to conference attendees, who are not all necessarily members of the association, half are black. Half aren't.

CHAVEZ: Renata, why is that?

SAGO: Other groups see benefits in what the association offers. The business world and job market have changed. It's now a globalized landscape where diversity and competition go hand in hand.

CHAVEZ: How is the National Black M-B-A Association responding to the changing demographic?

SAGO: It's embracing it. I spoke with Jesse Tyson, the president, who says the group isn't getting away from its core mission. It's just adapting to stay relevant. Here he is explaining how the mix prepares black job seekers for the real world:

"You're going to be competing once you get the job with those same folks, and so it's a reality and we just need to get ourselves prepared for it. But we also need to keep in mind that people come to our conferences because of the quality of what we do, but we can go to their conferences as well."

And you're seeing more partnerships, because together, groups have more leverage.

CHAVEZ: How are companies responding to the change?

SAGO: Conferences like the National Black MBA Association's serve as places where companies can see how diverse the job pool is. Companies are now rethinking how and who they recruit. You see diversity officers positions springing up. Their job is to recruit blacks, Latinos, veterans, the disabled, and LGBTQ candidates.

I spoke with Aporva Gandhi, vice president of Multicultural Affairs for Marriot, who said, "Businesses and organizations can miss out on great talent because of that. This is not about political correctness. This is about helping business be viable and relevant with the changing look and feel of customers."

He wants to make sure unconscious biases stay out of the hiring process. These sort of new hiring practices have benefited similar groups for Latino and Asian professionals.

CHAVEZ: That's 90.7's Renata Sago talking about changing demographics at the National Black MBA Association Conference and Expo. Thank you, Renata.

SAGO: Thank you, Crystal.



About Renata Sago
Reporter

Renata Sago joins the WMFE news team after reporting and anchoring for WVIK - Quad Cities NPR. She's covered a range of topics--from major political campaigns and unemployment to civil rights legislation and the performing arts. The Chicago native began her career in public radio as an intern for Worldview, ... [Read Full Bio >](#)