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Too Much Diversity?

Bill Baldwin, president and founder of Baldwin Scientific Instruments, had just finished meeting with Tran, a Baldwin assembler of Vietnamese descent. Tran was very upset about the treatment that he and his Vietnamese co-workers had been receiving from their first-line Latino supervisors, a brother and sister who were originally from Peru. Tran had reported that the two supervisors did not respect any of the 10 Vietnamese assemblers, that they were intentionally mean and rude to them, and that they spoke negatively about them in Spanish behind their back. He pointed out that the assemblers are the key to the firm's success, and asked the president to take immediate action to restore the respect they deserved.

Baldwin was aware that distrust and friction existed between the Latinos and Vietnamese. Fortunately, there had never been any fights or even loud arguments. However, he noticed that during lunch both groups sat apart and spoke in their native languages. At the annual company summer picnic and Christmas party, both groups also sat separately, and, while cordial, were never very friendly toward one another. Baldwin realized that part of the problem might be that the Latinos were often in supervisory positions whereas the Vietnamese were mostly assemblers. This structure reflected the fact that the Latino supervisors had far more experience and length of service than the new Vietnamese employees did. Bill also realized that another part of the problem might be that the head of the assembly department, a non-immigrant Californian who supervised the brother and sister, was not an effective leader because he refused to address employee relations problems. He knew a lot about assembling instruments, but allowed problems to fester among the diverse workforce rather than solve them.

As Baldwin was pondering what should be done, the sales manager walked into the office and gleefully announced that another large order had just come in. Baldwin knew this would necessitate the hiring of five more skilled assemblers, and that advertisements in the southern California area newspapers would result in mostly Latino and Vietnamese applicants. He wondered what the firm's hiring policy should be, given that he did not want to create more problems.

QUESTIONS

1. If you were Bill Baldwin, what actions would you take in response to Tran's request?
2. What hiring policy should the firm follow?
3. Does the firm have too diverse a workforce?