



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on December 18, 2015

Sam's Club CEO Admits Hiring and Promotions Based on Race and Gender

Rosalind Brewer, CEO of membership-based retail warehouse club Sam's Club, caused a stir last week when she told CNN's Poppy Harlow that she makes diversity "a priority" in her leadership team. She said, "I demand it of my team and within the structure [of Sam's Club], and every now and then you have to nudge your partners and you have to speak up and speak out."

Harlow asked her to clarify what she meant when she said she "demands" diversity of her team. She asked Brewer, "In hiring, do you demand it when you are hiring for the top spots?" Brewer was emphatic.

"Absolutely! And not only that ... I talk to my suppliers about it. Just today we met with a supplier and the entire other side of the table was all Caucasian male." She smiled, nodding her head, and added, "That was interesting." Then she laughed and repeated, "That was interesting."

It takes little imagination to predict the results if the CEO of that supplier had told CNN, "When we met with the leadership of Sam's Club, the entire other side of the table was all minorities and women. That was interesting." Much less if the CEO had then laughed as if it were ridiculous.

There is a ditch on either side of the road and it appears that Sam's Club has decided to steer toward the ditch of hiring and promoting based on race and gender, rather than talent and qualification. The company also seems to have no qualms about pressuring its suppliers to do the same. As Brewer put it, "Every now and then you have to nudge your partners."

Harlow asked Brewer how the top executive on the other side of the table responded to her "nudge." "So, what did he say?" Brewer answered, "Well I decided not to talk about it directly with his folks in the room because there were actually no female, like, levels down," Brewer said, adding, "So, I'm going to have to place a call to him."

In a truly free market in the 21st century, color and gender should not matter. True "diversity" happens when talented, qualified men and women of all races compete for the best jobs and companies focus on the talent and qualifications of those candidates instead of on their race and gender.

And in a free market, CEOs of major retailers have to answer to their customers. When companies refuse to promote minorities and women, they pay a price for their ignorance. Likewise, when a company has a policy of preferring minorities and women over white men who might be more qualified — and pressuring its suppliers to do the same — and the CEO says so on national television, it can





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expect to pay a price for its ignorance.

The backlash against Brewer's remarks began almost immediately. If the success of the Twitter and Facebook hashtags [#BoycottSamsClub](#) and [#BoycottRacistSamsClub](#) are any indication, the company may see the light after it feels the heat. A sampling of the tweets shows the level of disgust many feel over Brewer's remarks:

- Cancelling my Sam's Club now! [#boycottsamsclub](#)
- america lover (@gerkious)
- @SamsClub tolerates racism, sexism, and discrimination. [#BoycottSamsClub](#)
[#NotAnEqualOpportunityEmployer](#)
- Dennis QH3 (@Dennis_QH3)
- Costco here I come. [#boycottsamsclub](#)
- ToxicAvenger (@Thund3rStrukk)

Doug McMillon — CEO of Sam's Club's parent company, WalMart — stepped into the fray by issuing a public statement intended to show support for Brewer. His statement turned out to be more fuel for the fire. "For years, we've asked our suppliers to prioritize the talent and diversity of their sales teams calling on our company," he wrote, "Roz was simply trying to reiterate that we believe diverse and inclusive teams make for a stronger business. That's all there is to it and I support that important ideal."

So both WalMart and Sam's Club have a policy to "nudge" their suppliers by asking them to make sure that only a certain percentage of the salespeople who call on their buyers are white men. One is left to wonder how McMillon and Brewer can't see that dictating other companies' hiring based on race and gender is anything other than racist and sexist.

This policy implies not only that these CEOs find it hard to believe that perhaps the best salesperson a company has could possibly be white and male, but also that in 2015 the only way minorities and women can climb the ladder of success is by making sure they are the only ones who have access to it.

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