



Jim Kendall: Thinking about what's ahead?

You should chat with **Kathy Graham**, although, to be honest, you'll do more listening than chatting at least at the start. That's been my experience, anyway.

Nonetheless, Graham is one of us, an entrepreneur who owns four Chicago-based businesses that collectively are The HQ Companies, Inc., a group of companies focused, in Graham's words, on corporate and executive growth through strategic alignment, financial positioning, and human capital development.

Yes, that reads a bit like an ad, but, trust me here, those words are the quickest way of summarizing the combination of Graham's skills and interests. The conversation, which you'll ultimately plunge into, focuses these days a lot on diversity - of the workforce and of practically every business' customer base.

Basically, the conversation will center on how digital has changed our businesses not, for example, just by cleaning up the invoicing process but how digital processes have changed our processes. Before you and Graham connect, you may want to study one or two of Graham's white papers by yourself.

Graham's prime value is that she raises issues the rest of us should think about, with, like it or not, diversity high on the list. For example: The Illinois General Assembly in June passed diversity disclosure legislation intended to tell customers, suppliers - anyone interested the representation (or not) of women and minorities on company boards of directors.

Originally, the idea was to require businesses to match board makeup with, basically, community makeup if, for example, the community is 25 percent African-American female, so will your board be. Now, however, the requirement seems to be for businesses simply to report by gender, race, ethnicity, whatever, the nature of their boards of directors.

Potentially, that's big and, for many of us, uncomfortable change. Know, however, that similar requirements already exist in California, Massachusetts, Maryland and New Jersey.

With maybe half a dozen states at least on the way to requiring local business boards of directors to essentially match the marketplace, diversity-market matchups are going to be an issue.

"The momentum is building," says Graham. "Customers, even the younger generation in many family businesses, want the company (especially its leadership) to look like the marketplace.

"Increasingly, what I do is all about people and the role of people to grow corporations large and small."

Here's the rub: Not all of us may be ready for the diversity issue, but we should be aware that Graham has called other business issues correctly. She's smart. She pays attention to trends, refusing to call a trend until there actually is an indication that change is taking hold.

She'll give guests at your chamber luncheon something to chew on. She'll start a surprisingly well-focused discussion among your management team.

Alternatively, take some time to review some of Graham's earlier papers. Take a look at Graham's business website, www.thehqcompanies.com. Click on Forecasts/White Papers and review some of her thoughts.

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