

IN HONOR OF DR. R. ROOSEVELT THOMAS, JR., FOUNDER OF DIVERSITY
MANAGEMENT

PRESS RELEASE: For Immediate Release

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DECATUR, GA: Dr. R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr., D.B.A, a founding member of the Diversity Collegium, and considered one of the founders of the field that has come to be known as Diversity and Inclusion, died suddenly on May 17, 2013. The funeral will be 11:00 am, May 24, which would have been his 69th birthday, at the Friendship Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia.

(See obituaries: Carl M. Williams Funeral directors website:

<http://www.carlmwilliams.com/obits/obituary.php?id=298187>; Atlanta Journal

Constitution website: <http://bit.ly/17VOMCa>)

In a career that spanned almost 30 years, Dr. Thomas is considered to be the foremost thought leader in the diversity arena. His initial approach, diversity management, evolved into the rubric of the Strategic Diversity Management ProcessTM, which helped many organizational leaders make quality decisions in the midst of diversity, develop diversity-capable managers, foster collaboration and innovation, and achieve desired business outcomes.

His impact reached hundreds of organizations and thousands of people through his consulting firm, Roosevelt Thomas Consulting and Training, as well as through his speeches and presentations at leadership, management, and diversity conferences over the years. At the time of his death, he was filled with energy and excitement about continuing his work and contributing to the field.

Sid Reel, a Diversity Collegium member, recalls being inspired by "Roosevelt's brilliance [as a leader] and courageous humility" as she began her journey as a new diversity manager at Pacific Bell in 1993. "I treasure the precious few moments we conversed about the world we wanted that includes and respects everyone."

Nene Molefi, a Collegium member based in South Africa, points to one of the most profound accomplishments of Dr. Thomas—his ability to integrate diversity management into the mainstream of organisational life. "Back in the early nineties his definition of diversity as a 'collective mixture of differences & similarities' helped me explain the concept to South African top management, who were just beginning to grapple with the democratic changes and saw diversity as just an attack on racial grounds. That definition made leaders to want to listen. His assertion that good intentions alone are not enough to shift the system remains a great learning point for many leaders."

In 1984, concerned that American organizations were missing the potential benefits of a fully contributing diverse workforce, he founded the American Institute for Managing Diversity as a non-profit research and education enterprise. The Institute became a seminal source for the new concepts and strategies associated with diversity management.

Melanie Harrington, former president of AIMD, describes Dr. Thomas in action as he worked to move and shift the diversity dialogue. "He would take a transfixed audience on a journey that began with 'conceptual clarity' and ended with a greater understanding of the 'promise of diversity.' He would use personal and professional stories to make his point. He constantly reminded me that the promise for the nation and the world lies in our willingness and capability to master the 'craft' of managing diversity. Although he is no longer with us, his legacy and his words will live on."

In 1990, Dr. Thomas ignited a new way of thinking about diversity in organizations with his landmark and often-quoted article, *From Affirmative Action to Affirming Diversity* (Harvard Business Review, March-April 1990). This article challenged companies and organizations to move beyond EEO to the challenges of empowering a diverse workforce. He followed that article with a best-selling book, *Beyond Race and Gender: Unleashing the Power of Your Total Work Force by Managing Diversity* (AMACOM, 1991). He went on to write six more books, the most recent, *World Class Diversity Management: A Strategic Approach* (Berrett-Koehler, 2010), which details the evolution of his thinking over the years.

Dr. Thomas had become a member of the Authors Cooperative at Berrett Koehler, the publisher of his last two books. Jamie Showkeir, past president of the Authors Co-op, describes Roosevelt as "soft spoken, very intelligent, kind and compassionate—he had a view of diversity that was unique—diversity was a way of thinking about business, about education, about life. He embodied the mission of Berrett-Koehler, 'creating a world that works for all,' more than anyone I have ever met in my life."

In 1991, Dr. Thomas was among a group of progressive African American consultants who envisioned an informal think tank that might help advance the fledgling field of diversity. Opting for collegiality, the group put aside their competitive consulting practices to come together regularly in what became known as the Diversity Collegium. Dr. Price Cobbs, also a founding member now Emeritus reminisces: "By joining with Roosevelt and others to form the Diversity Collegium, we became more trusting colleagues and warmer friends. We came to share the joy, pain and triumphs of our work. In no other setting were we able to bare our souls so freely."

Today, the Diversity Collegium continues the think-tank work envisioned by its founders; it is made up of a diverse group of 17 internal and external diversity professionals based in four countries and 10 Emeritus members. Dr. Thomas, who had become an Emeritus member in 2012, joined the group at its most recent meeting in late April in Atlanta, Georgia.

More of the history of the Diversity Collegium can be found here: <http://diversitycollegium.org/history.html>. For a paper on the future of affirmative action and diversity written by Dr. Thomas, visit this page on the Collegium website: <http://www.diversitycollegium.org/publications.html>).

Dr. Thomas consulted with numerous Fortune 500 companies, professional firms, government entities, non-profit organizations, and academic institutions, and he spoke frequently at national conferences and industry seminars. He also served as secretary of Morehouse College, dean of the Graduate School of Business Administration at Atlanta University, assistant professor at the Harvard Business School, and instructor at Morehouse College.

He was recognized by The Wall Street Journal as one of the top ten consultants in the country. Recipient of several national awards, he was elected as a Fellow by the National Academy of Human Resources, was cited by Human Resource Executive as one of HR's Most Influential People, and was awarded the "Distinguished Contribution to Human Resources Development" Award by the American Society of Training and Development. In addition, he was honored with the "Trailblazers in Diversity" Award by Bennett College, and designated an Inaugural "Legends of Diversity" Honoree by the International Society of Diversity and Inclusion Professionals in 2012.

Dr. Thomas held a D.B.A. in Organizational Behavior from Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration; an M.B.A. in Finance from the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business Administration; and a B.A. in Mathematics from Morehouse College.

Many people looked to Dr. Thomas or "Dr. T", as he was lovingly called by his closest colleagues, as a mentor and collaborative colleague. Others remember his gentle spirit and commitment to family and community. Mary-Frances Winters, Collegium Emeritus member describes Dr. Thomas as "an amazing thought leader, as well as a wonderful, kind and compassionate person, strong in his faith." Michael Wheeler, former Collegium member saw "a great man on so many levels. He enriched the lives of those who knew him and the world is a better place because of him." Juan Lopez, also Collegium Emeritus member was impressed by Roosevelt's humility and compassion. "I have always thought that many in the practice didn't really know or appreciate his being. Certainly, his body of knowledge was available but who he was, less so. His 'sweet soul' helped influence a new field of study and practice. He encouraged and supported many of us — he was a generous man." And Collegium member Donna Stringer adds, "Dr. Thomas' impact on the diversity field is, indeed, legendary."

Lynda White, current Collegium president, fondly remembers a Collegium meeting where she and Roosevelt were trying to comply with the agenda to learn a few dance steps performed by an African dance troupe. "We were both laughing and giggling together at our own ineptitude and I just so remember his wide smile, laugh and out and out giggle—we so often saw his more serious and professional side but this was one of the times where I saw the man who also had a light side and was full of fun!"

And Dr. Thomas' influence has not escaped the younger generations, exemplified by Joel Brown, a new Collegium member representing Gen X, "Roosevelt was the Gentle Giant of Diversity: a humble savant, a gracious leader, and a wonderful example."

"The incredible, ground breaking conceptual contributions to the field of diversity made by Dr. Roosevelt Thomas would have outlived him regardless of when he left us," remarks Kay Iwata, Collegium Emeritus member. "Roosevelt was always five years ahead of the field in his thinking. He pressed us to reframe how we thought about diversity and the challenges and opportunities it offered. It is with great sadness we must say such a premature 'good-bye.'"

For more information about R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr. and additional information about funeral services and other events, please check the Diversity Collegium website frequently for updates: <http://www.diversitycollegium.org>. Tribute events and ideas honoring Dr. Thomas and information will also be posted, so please check frequently for updates.

For information about the funeral service for Dr. R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr., please visit the Carl M. Williams Funeral Directors website:
<http://www.carlmwilliams.com/obits/obituary.php?id=298187>

To express condolences, please post on one of two sites:

One is sponsored by the funeral home:

<http://www.carlmwilliams.com/obits/obituary.php?id=298187>

The other is the Atlanta Journal-Constitution

<http://www.legacy.com/guestbooks/atlanta/guestbook.aspx?n=r-thomas&pid=164849858>

The family requests donations in lieu of flowers. Donations may be made to the Save Our Students Academy, Inc. <http://sosa1.com>. Click on the Donate button to make a donation. Please be sure you are on the Save Our Children Academy, Inc. and not on a similarly named site. You will notice Judge Ruby Thomas' information on the correct site.

Cards to the family may be sent to: The family of R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr. c/o Carl M. Williams Funeral Directors, Inc., 492 Larkin St. SW, Atlanta, GA 30313