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It was simple — so wondrously simple that he wondered why he didn't think of it before.

About four years ago, Michael Bach, an IT professional with accounting giant KPMG in Toronto, walked into the human resources director's office and said he wanted to promote diversity at the company. Beth Wilson told him to write a business case. A month later, he presented it to the board of directors and got a new job, a team and a budget of just over \$500,000.

"I was told to go rock the boat," said Bach, national director of diversity, KPMG Canada.

He's done that, and more.

In four years, he launched initiatives to recruit and retain employees from diverse backgrounds, and a mandatory online-training program for employees on diversity issues. KPMG now has diversity councils at many of its 32 offices in Canada. The company also has a number of social clubs, including an international club, where members meet regularly to offer support to employees who are new to the country.

Bach, 39, has been nominated for the Toronto Region Employment Council's Canadian HR Reporter Award for Individual Achievement 2009. The award recognizes someone who has demonstrated leadership and innovation in integrating immigrants in the workplace.

Beth Wilson, KPMG's Toronto managing partner and Canadian managing partner for community leadership, said Bach is a real champion of diversity and has introduced some incredible changes in the past few years. One was to start and encourage networks such as the women's group; a forum for parents with special needs children, and religious groups and international clubs.

"Groups like the international club help connect and support newcomers ... in things like how to find a good doctor," said Wilson.

"He (Bach) has taken a grassroots idea and made it into a best practise."

In the past four years, Bach has taken information gathered in different internal surveys and used it to bring positive changes. "There are surveys like engagement of a worker or inclusively tolerance...he's taken them to the next level by identifying the gaps and narrowing them," Wilson said.

Multipurpose reflection rooms in almost all KPMG offices have proven popular. The rooms are a dedicated space for quiet observation, prayers, meditation or breast-feeding. The idea came from a Muslim employee who wondered aloud if there was some quiet place at work where he could pray for a few minutes.

"I realized it was a reasonable request, and we need a place for, not only prayers, but others things, too," said Bach.

His bosses agreed to give up valuable real estate for this use.

Before joining KPMG about five years ago, Bach worked at Queen's Park, a bank south of the border and a telecommunications company, and had racked up about 20 years of experience. He's tried to bring innovations at every workplace.

Barring some hiccups, most have worked well.

At KPMG, the biggest roadblock was lack of understanding and awareness, said Bach. "There was some scepticism as people thought they would lose out in some way when we talked about being more diverse. The message that we had was: It's not about losing anything, but offering everyone equal opportunities and that can benefit the company."



Michael Bach of KPMG with members of his Asian network, one of the firm's diversity groups. Bach made the business case for diversity at KPMG and created a job and a team around it.

Tara Walton/Toronto Star

Bach, who has a team of two and a budget of a little more than \$600,000 every year, believes in subtle messaging. "For instance, we take four cultural events every year and put up a celebration. The presentations are about 10 minutes long, but it gets people together to learn something new. There is preaching, mind you."

Getting the job was easy, implementing ideas was also easy but changing people's minds was a bit tougher, said Bach. "But we've got there."