

# Speaker promotes diversity

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By By Mike Hall

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Diversity awareness is good for business, but that isn't the best reason to seek it, according to Dr. Renate R. Mai-Dalton.

Mai-Dalton, who is with the Multicultural Business Scholars Program in the School of Business at The University of Kansas, spoke Tuesday at the annual awards luncheon of the Mayor's Council on Diversity.

She said she was asked by Robert Bugg, when he invited her to speak, to address the "business bottom line." She said she agreed to do it but really wanted to talk about the social benefits of diversity.

Mai-Dalton, a native of Berlin, Germany, married an black serviceman stationed in Germany and came to the United States with him. Over the years, she has lived in eight cities in the United States but has been in Lawrence since 1979.

"Here's the business bottom line: We want to match the customer to the business," she said.

She said that as the customer population becomes more diverse, companies will need more employees who can understand the cultures from which their customers come.

But the real benefit of diversity is to the individual, she said. She urged people to become more "diversity literate" and offered suggestions, including:

- Have monthly dinner meetings with people from different cultures in which the food and discussion each time is from a different culture.
- Immerse yourself in a different culture for a half day or full day by attending a different church, attending a powwow or serving in a soup kitchen.
- Learn another language.
- Be supportive of people using multiple languages as a way to keep other languages and cultures alive.

"Don't be offended -- most often they're not talking about you," she said.

- Travel.

"When we learn another culture, we're never really the same as we were," she said.

Three businesses and one nonprofit organization were recognized at the luncheon for their programs to "Commit to Diversity." They were Security Benefit Group of Cos., Westar Energy, Hill's Pet Nutrition and the YWCA of Topeka.

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