

The Traps—and Triumphs—of D&I Training

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ClarkDietrich and AMA Case Study



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The Traps—and Triumphs—of D&I Training

By Alvin S. Albert

The same traps that make D&I training so challenging also make it exhilarating and worthwhile.

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Striving for Diversity a Business Imperative

Here in 2020, on top of a global pandemic, we're still dealing with a lack of diversity and equality in society and in the business world. Now is the time for leaders to stand up and help their companies achieve a better future.

This issue of *AMA Quarterly* focuses on how to achieve diversity and inclusion in the workplace. D&I are now the critical elements every business needs to survive.

Our cover article by AMA faculty member Alvin S. Albert looks at the traps in mindset that companies can run into when doing diversity training, how these can be best overcome, and what the hallmarks of successful training are.

Another AMA faculty member, Frederica A. Peterson, reminds us that to tackle systemic racism, we must get ready to be uncomfortable as we replace ignorance with knowledge.

Lawyer Benjamin E. Widener looks at the legal aspects of D&I programs—things that might be important to know for any HR manager trying to set up initiatives and training at their own companies.

Mikaela Kiner contends that for companies to improve their diversity and inclusion, managers must be equipped with the right sensibilities and skills to run a diverse and inclusive workplace.

Michael Bach stresses how education must be done at all levels of an organization for diversity and inclusion measures to succeed.

Past contributor Rebecca Cenni-Leventhal looks at how to make diversity part of your company's culture and value system.

Also highlighted on this issue's cover is a case study on AMA client ClarkDietrich. The company engaged AMA to create a management training program to help reinforce what is the key role of a manager at ClarkDietrich: engaging employees around the United States to continue to grow and identify opportunities for the company's people and the business.

Whatever your need for diversity and inclusion training, AMA has several courses to accommodate you.

Christiane Truelove
Guest Editor, *AMA Quarterly*

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Leaders Must Meet the Challenges of Workplace Diversity

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented one of the most challenging times for company leaders in decades. As remote work continues and many companies cautiously reopen, one of the primary challenges for leaders is diversity in the workplace. As a nation and global community, we have made significant progress over the past several decades, but there is more work to be done.

There are countless studies that show the benefits of increased workplace diversity. One of these benefits is access to best-in-class talent in places you normally would not search. This diverse talent often produces new ideas and can give insights into your customer base that you normally would not have uncovered. Diversity could also be good for your company's financial health. Back in 2015, McKinsey research established that companies with greater gender or racial and ethnic diversity in comparison to their peers are more likely to have above-average financial returns—and companies in the bottom quartile are less likely to achieve these results.

While the benefits are easy to see, achieving diversity in the workplace remains difficult. There are four main aspects of an effective and fair diverse workplace—diversity, inclusion, belonging, and equity. Many organizations have achieved all four, while others continue to search for answers.

The first aspect, and perhaps easiest to accomplish, is to assemble a diverse workforce. Such a workforce includes differences in gender, ethnicity, and religion. Second, it is important to include diversity throughout all levels of employment, from entry level up to senior management. This will help ensure that work initiatives include diverse teams. Third, I cannot emphasize enough that there is a significant difference between inclusion and belonging. Just because people are included, it does not mean that they have a feeling of belonging. When an individual does not have a strong sense of belonging, it can be detrimental to performance—hence, having a negative impact on the business and ultimately a customer. Fourth, a fair workplace must have equity in compensation. Similar or same results achieved by similar or same experienced employees should yield similar or same compensation.

There are resources available to you to address those challenges and many others. American Management Association has a Diversity and Inclusion practice that includes free resources that can be leveraged to create a competitive advantage through diversity, inclusion, belonging, and equity. Such resources include proven methodologies that have been leveraged by thousands of individuals and organizations to create a competitive advantage.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Manny Avramidis'.

Manny Avramidis
President and CEO
American Management Association



The Traps—and Triumphs—of D&I TRAINING

BY ALVIN S. ALBERT

In most trainings, you never know who will show up and what they've been told. This is especially true for D&I training.

At one of these trainings, I anxiously waited in the breakroom turned training room for my attendees to show up.

The first person to show was my contact person, who proceeded to “warn” me about the group: “There are going to be a couple of attendees who won’t be happy about being here. I’ll make a brief speech to begin and then turn it over to you.”

My next arrival was happy to see me and let me know why. “I’m glad you’re here. This company has some real issues. I hope you’re gonna set folks straight.” Not exactly what I wanted to hear at 7 a.m. on a cold morning in the rural Pennsylvania hills. It does, however, represent the idea that many people have of diversity and inclusion training. It is either a check-the-box mandate or a quick panacea for all of the company’s cultural ills.

THE CONTINUED CASE FOR D&I TRAINING

You can find exhaustive studies on the business case for workplace diversity. However, debate has always raged concerning the efficacy of D&I training. I believe the definitive answer to that debate should come from the rank and file. In 2018, the Boston Consulting Group surveyed 16,500 racially and ethnically diverse employees in 14 countries and asked them to rate the relative effectiveness of 31 diversity initiatives. Across all diversity groups, “formal training”

ranked in the top four in importance. Recently, we have seen high-profile training initiatives in companies such as Starbucks and Sephora, both of which closed their stores for all-employee racial bias training. It appears that, regardless of modality, quality, or focus, D&I training is still the most efficient way to at least get the ball rolling on a more inclusive and respectful workplace.

THE TRAPS OF D&I TRAINING

A 2016 article in *The Economist*, “Diversity Fatigue,” suggested that 12 of the most terrifying words in the English language are “I’m from human resources and I’m here to organize a diversity workshop.”

While the previous statement is somewhat in jest, there are certain “traps” inherent in D&I training—traps for the organization and the attendees. These traps have been well researched and documented. My job as facilitator is to be aware of them and prepare accordingly. Knowing and addressing the traps are key to a successful training session.

Trap No. 1. The training is a mandatory exercise that needs to be suffered through. One of the main drivers of interpersonal conflict is the feeling that control is being taken from you. Why wouldn’t this apply to mandatory D&I training? If I am forced to attend, then the only control I still have is to

“People are more likely to cooperate if they feel that your position and actions are consistent with theirs. If I acknowledge and validate your concern, then your resistance is unfounded.”



go grudgingly and with minimal participation. Rarely is D&I training optional—and rarely do we address that elephant.

Trap No. 2. I will be singled out and put on the “hot seat.” Surprisingly, this applies to just about anyone in attendance at a D&I training. Attendees are often given very little, if any, information about the content of the training and are left to their own assumptions. These assumptions can include training scenarios where someone is blamed, embarrassed, or protected.

Trap No. 3. This one-and-done class will fix everything. For organizations that don’t have formal D&I programs or strategies, the training is often the only initiative. Issues often come up during training that are beyond the trainer’s scope and authority to address. This is especially true in full-day and multiday trainings with an open dialogue. Organizations must expect that a properly facilitated training may uncover issues, and solutions, it had not anticipated.

I have encountered all of these traps in my training experiences. Actually, let me rephrase that: I encounter all of these traps in every experience.

DEFUSING THE TRAPS

One of the courses I facilitate is AMA’s *Leading in a Diverse and Inclusive Culture*. I am fortunate that the content in that course is consistent with my personal philosophy on D&I training, in that it should focus on unconscious bias, cultural competency, behavioral styles, and personal values. These are universal themes that are all encompassing and guilt-free. They do not dodge uncomfortable issues of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc., but put them in proper context. My goal in every training is to leave the group better equipped than when we started.

I recently watched a war movie where the soldiers were punished by being assigned landmine duty. One soldier would detect the landmine, and another soldier would dig it up and defuse it. The objective was to clear a safe path of passage for the troops. D&I trainers have the same responsibility.

While all experienced D&I trainers have their own “secret sauce” for addressing the traps, here are the primary concepts I emphasize to defuse them.

ADDRESS THE ELEPHANTS

Getting back to that recent training session I led, a rather large field technician from the back of the room loudly proclaimed, “This is some %&#!. Why do we have to be here?” (I later discovered that the training was taking place during some of the attendees’ lunch break. Lucky me.)

My response was, “I agree. Having a training forced on you can suck, but let me ask you two questions. How long have you worked here, and why do you think the company is addressing workplace policy, harassment, and diversity today?”

He replied, “I’ve been here 12 years, and I think we have to be here because someone probably screwed up.”

I said, “Yep. Thank you. Exactly right. Someone screwed up, and I want to make sure that you know the policy so that you’re not next. I don’t want you to do anything that puts your job in jeopardy and waste those 12 years you have invested.”

He was fully cooperative for the training and turned out to be a very decent guy who just needed to be heard.

The law of consistency is an influencing skill technique popularized by Robert Cialdini. In short, it means that people are more likely to cooperate if they feel that your position and actions are consistent with theirs. If I acknowledge and validate your concern, then your resistance is unfounded.

If I am aware that the training group has certain opinions or thoughts about the training, I address these at the outset. This enhances the comfort level and, hopefully, signals that this training will be different from previous ones.

While my response may be contrary to D&I Training 101, it is a real and authentic response. As workplace D&I training becomes more common, I believe learners will expect a more realistic and authentic training experience.

ADDRESS THE INDIVIDUAL

Whenever possible, I try to drive all exercises, data, and discussions down to a personal level. It's not about just hitting all the buzzwords (I rarely use the word "diversity") and legal jargon. It's the goal of any professional development training: introspection and improvement.

Individuals in D&I training are asking themselves, "How does this relate to my personal actions and beliefs?" Getting people to share their personal revelations can pay huge dividends—and it's the ultimate purpose of D&I training. Nothing validates the training more than having one of the participants acknowledge a breakthrough or confirm a concept. Even neutral or somewhat negative contributions (done respectfully) can signal safety and a willingness to be transparent and candid. It also can signal that the training is about the participants rather than a canned corporate mandate.

In a multiday training, I will often comment on how well different individuals in the training have treated each other—and how that treatment impacts me. My objective is to relate the entire training to universal themes valued by each individual—respect, culture, responsibility, belonging, family, and so forth. I know it's a worn cliché to say "If I help one person, then my time has been worth it." In this case, it may be true. If a manager of 10 people becomes more self-aware and culturally competent, you've just impacted 11 lives.

ADDRESS THE "SO WHAT?"

When designing activities for my curriculum, I always ask myself, "So what? What is the payoff of this activity or exercise?" Practitioners and organizations should ask the same question of D&I training. In the overwhelming majority of my trainings, I am not tasked with finding solutions. I don't have the time, nor do I have adequate background information—but the attendees do.

In one particularly delicate D&I leadership training with a group of managers, some of whom did not like each other, one of the younger supervisors said, "We used to have company outings. What happened to that?" This question resulted in a very positive ending, with the group brainstorming and recording ideas for social functions. So what? Well, they were trying to solve a real problem. How would they build inclusion, relationships, and cultural competence when they really didn't know each other? The group then moved on to creating a list of action items for senior management that I agreed to pass along. As a D&I trainer, I can't fix everything in a day, but I can help.

Problem solving and action planning were not in the design of this class, but it was paramount for the attendees to have a sense of accomplishment. Whether an organization is training a select group or the entire employee base, most want a return on their training dollars. That return is best initiated by

actionable strategies for the individual and the organization. Otherwise, we've just spent two days "checking the boxes."

THE FINAL CASE FOR TRAINING

There can be several identifiable benefits of a well-done D&I training:

Conflict management. In many of my D&I trainings, there is unresolved conflict among participants. D&I training can be a more subtle form of conflict management training—without the stigma. I once conducted *Leading in a Diverse and Inclusive Culture* training in arguably the smallest room I've ever trained in. A dozen managers, some with ongoing conflicts, had to practice being civil, respectful, and collaborative in a confined space (I made sure to point this out to them at the end).

Policy review. In a customized AMA class on "Respect and Dignity in the Workplace," a D&I policy review was incorporated into the activities. While all formally acknowledged "reading" the policy, the training made it obvious that few had really reviewed and understood it. The new policy was an excellent rationale for the timing of the training.

Employee well-being. When employees feel a lack of belonging or inclusion, they eventually leave. Knowing that my company recognizes an issue and has spent the time and resources to address it can make a big difference in physical wellness, retention, and engagement.

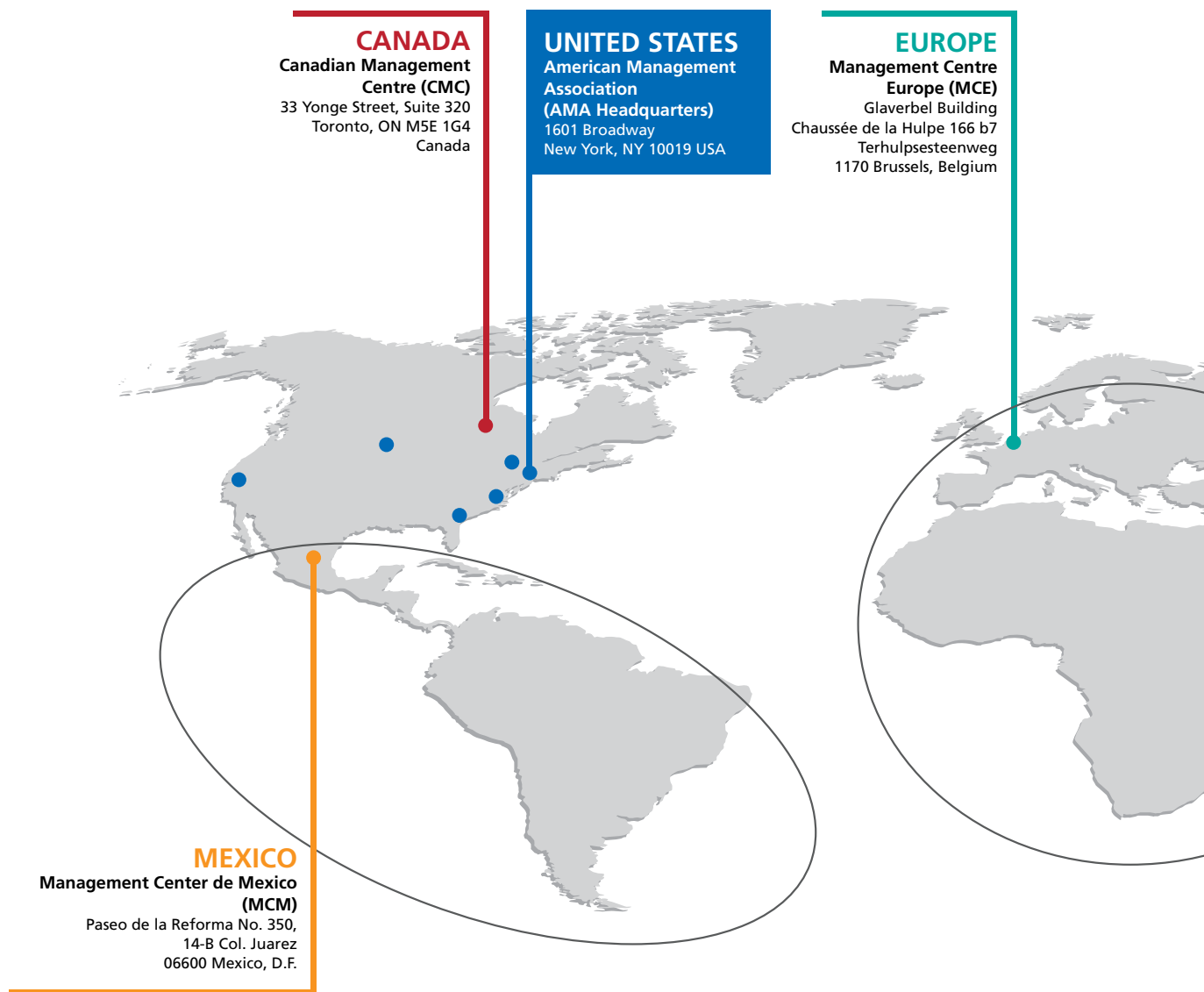
Better relationships. The ultimate goal of the training is to deepen understanding among participants. Deeper understanding ideally translates into deeper relationships.

Improved interpersonal skills. One of the top challenges I hear in training is, "Things change so fast, I don't know what's acceptable anymore." D&I training is often the only opportunity that employees have to openly discuss communication and conduct norms. We tend to avoid things that make us uncomfortable. Training hopefully raises the comfort level and allows individuals to be more transparent and transformative.

No two D&I trainings are ever the same. Different personalities, different workplace cultures, and different reactions keep it interesting. The same traps that make D&I training so challenging also make it exhilarating and worthwhile. I've done training on a dozen different subjects to hundreds of audiences, including topics such as leadership training to make you a better boss and communication training to make you a better counselor. Exploring the concepts of empathy, respect, and belonging in D&I training can ultimately make you a better person. [AQ](#)

Alvin S. Albert is an attorney and the chief facilitator at Smart Work Cultures. As a trainer, he helps managers and teams develop influencing skills to transform conflict into cooperation. He has been an AMA faculty member since 2008.

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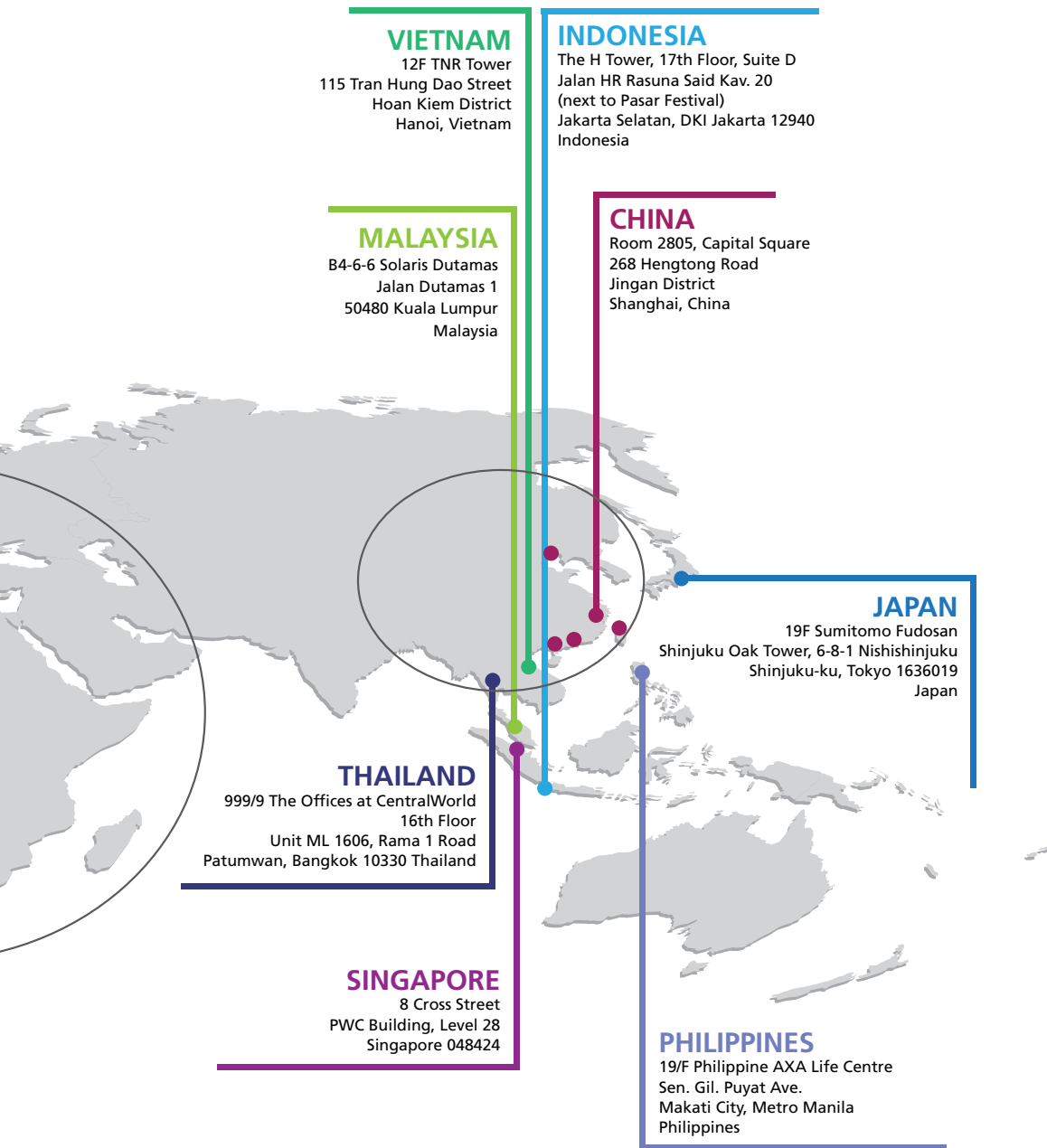
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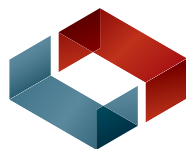
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CLARKDIETRICH AND AMA CASE STUDY

PURPOSE, VALUES, AND VOICES:

Standing Together to Support a
Culture of High Performance



ClarkDietrich®

The ClarkDietrich company was formed in 2011 from the collaboration of two industry-leading organizations that valued relationships and doing things right.

Collaboration remains a cornerstone of the company's success. In 2018, when ClarkDietrich began its search for a training partner to help it create a managerial training program, the company found an experienced, proven partner in American Management Association (AMA).

As the largest manufacturer of cold-formed steel framing in North America, ClarkDietrich has continued to grow through innovative designs, product development, and leveraging new technologies. This success has been fueled by the company's loyal, innovative, and talented employees who have embraced the constant changes in the construction industry.

Executives attest that collaboration requires a commitment to innovation, problem solving, and creating opportunities for everyone to succeed. ClarkDietrich's decision to invest in the development of managers and supervisors is just another reflection of the company's "Do the Right Thing—Do Things Right" commitment. The key role of a manager at ClarkDietrich is to engage employees around the United States to continue to grow and identify opportunities for the company's people and the business. Executives say this commitment requires a high level of trust, communication, alignment, and relationship-building to support a culture of high performance.

"More transparent organizations inspire more engaged and committed employees," says Todd Barnett, recently retired VP of human resources. "When employees can take greater ownership in the success of whatever venture it is that the company's embarking on and feel they're part of the inner circle, it affects the overall success of the organization. [Without that transparency] folks begin to wonder what's going on. And when they do that, they expend energy in a nonproductive way. If they don't know what's happening, they can't put their actions in the context of what's going on across the board of the organization. And so, it is a very delicate balance."

"Good management boils down to trust," Barnett says. "Especially when there is a lot of change going on. [When there is trust] there's a sense of camaraderie, and teamwork is enhanced, and I think their overall contribution is greater than it might be otherwise, because they don't have to worry about what's going on." Research supports that employee productivity is strongest when managers not only are able to manage projects and workflow but also are able to

navigate that delicate balance of communication and relationship-building.

Managers need to effectively communicate change, manage conflict, and inspire workers when things get tough. Research reveals that more than 70% of team performance issues are related to the performance of managers and supervisors,¹ and that inefficient management leads to lost productivity of \$1 trillion annually in the United States.²

"That transparency and communication has to happen at every level so everyone's on the same page," adds Jennifer Smith, VP of human resources. "It helps with team building, engaging and motivating employees, and retention."

With this goal in mind, ClarkDietrich's human resources team explored how they could help their managers create a more productive and useful performance management process. This led the team to identify a number of managerial skills that would benefit from a "refresh" while providing a chance for many newer supervisors and managers to be exposed to these skills for the first time. The team decided to provide classroom training that would deliver the additional benefits of team building, networking, and sharing of knowledge and experiences.

"We've also definitely put a focus towards succession planning in the last few years in terms of developing our people," Smith says. "We want to empower our managers to feel good about having crucial conversations with their employees, and to talk about where they see themselves in a year versus three to five years. This initiative was to support that [goal] and get them where they want to go in their careers."

THE PROJECT: A NEW WAY TO BUILD HIGH PERFORMANCE

ClarkDietrich began working with a pilot group of managers to develop a new approach to performance reviews. The company identified new ways of providing feedback and coaching over time to replace the annual performance review.

"Trying to sum up a year's worth of performance on a formal written document does not really feel like building a bridge with team members," Smith says. "It caused a lot of stress for both the manager and the employee. What manager wants to do that?"



"The more knowledge our leaders have, the more confident, empowered, and prepared they will be for the future. Over the last several years, we have made strides to build our bench, and the leadership training delivered by AMA was a great way to do this."

—Jim Collins, President and CEO

According to a Wakefield Research study,³ 94% of employees prefer getting feedback and coaching in real-time, on the job, and not in performance reviews, which they feel are outdated. "Based on feedback from staff, we decided, let's do more frequent, less formal communication to really build those relationships," Smith says. And those relationships led to more effective discussions about employee roles and performance gaps.

"Sometimes employees are promoted and don't quite realize what the full job of being a manager entails," agrees Mary Lehr, director of human resources. "So, we initiated training to reinforce what it means to be a manager. It gets everyone on the same page on what a manager does, the role of HR, and how to handle difficult issues. Different people like to

be communicated with in different ways, and we wanted to enable our managers and supervisors to have that flexibility in communication styles."

SOLUTION

To help employees transition from a formal performance management process to a more engaging coaching model, ClarkDietrich partnered with AMA. AMA worked with ClarkDietrich's HR team through each step to develop a fully customized, instructor-led program that was delivered over two days onsite at the company's West Chester Township, Ohio, headquarters for approximately 100 managers and supervisors. The sessions were provided for groups of 25 participants per session to ensure plenty of time for activities

Participant Comments and Feedback

"The best course of this type I've taken."

"I have been through many seminars and trainings on management and leadership. This by far was the best. The facilitator was amazing, the content was useful, and was presented in an applicable, engaging way. I will definitely be able to translate this into action, helping me be a better leader!"

"I couldn't have been happier with the course. I felt that I left with tactile, usable information to help me as an individual contributor as well as an indirect manager to our supervisory groups."

"The instructor was very professional and kept the class entertained. This was one of the most useful classes I have attended and had a lot of topics that could be easily applied at work."

and discussions. Each group contained a mix of managers and leaders—from team leads to plant managers to leaders from every department across the company. This mix provided a great opportunity for cross-functional networking and collaborative learning.

With AMA's support, ClarkDietrich's team was able to accomplish a number of the identified development goals:

- Promote self-awareness of the leaders' preferred communication styles and how they affect those around them
- Help managers adapt to the communication styles of their direct reports and colleagues to build better relationships
- Improve their ability to communicate direction, plans, goals, and objectives
- Practice their listening skills to uncover underlying issues and better manage conflict
- Establish trust
- Refine their communication skills to engage and empower their direct reports

ClarkDietrich's internal use of a Styles Assessment Tool was also reinforced within this training program. AMA's training facilitator was able to build on what ClarkDietrich had begun to gather internally to further maximize ways to use this important knowledge.

DRIVING LASTING ENGAGEMENT AND RETENTION


Response to the management development program has been overwhelmingly positive. More important is the notable improvement in engagement and positive behavioral changes.

"There are several managers that come to mind," Lehr says. "The training has really changed their behavior at work. In the past, it's been really hard for some managers to manage change." She adds, "They are more open and more communicative, and it really makes a difference."

"I think the best indication that we've truly engaged our employees is our retention rate," Smith says. "We've had a lot of organizational change this last year. Because of that, we've had a lot of positions open up, and many internal candidates vying for those positions. Turnover is low. Employees want to stay, they want to grow with ClarkDietrich. We're really proud of our retention efforts, and this program was a fundamental part of building those relationships."

"We expect a lot from our vendors and partnerships," Smith continues. "The fact that AMA was willing to work with us, and work with us so well, customizing a program for our employees, won us over. The content was backed up by research, the facilitator brought in real-world experience, and the delivery was amazing."

Because the 2019 training was so successful, ClarkDietrich has extended the program and has scheduled an additional 100 managers to be trained in fall 2020.

"I think training and development for our leaders only makes us stronger as a company," says President and CEO Jim Collins. "The more knowledge our leaders have, the more confident, empowered, and prepared they will be for the future. Over the last several years, we have made strides to build our bench, and the leadership training delivered by AMA was a great way to do this." 

1 Clifton, J. and Harter, J. *It's the Manager*. Gallup Press, 2019.

2 Hamel, G. and Zanini, M. "Excess Management Is Costing the U.S. \$3 Trillion Per Year." *Harvard Business Review*. September 2016.

3 Reflektive. "New Study Uncovers Major Gap in Employee and Employer Expectations for Performance Management and Growth." April 2018.

"As a new manager, this class provided insightful details on how to inspire those around for exponential results."

"Our instructor was extremely well versed in the subject matter. He kept the tempo of the training flowing well, providing activities to get participants up and moving, as well as asking participation questions. I was able to take away several items to apply in my daily work life and correspondence with fellow managers."

"Useful selections from a very broad range of topics. The instructor was terrific: used examples and experiences from his own life to make the topics of the presentation relatable and memorable."



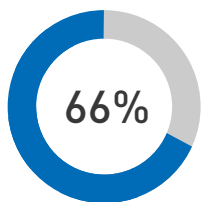


DIVERSITY, INCLUSION AND BELONGING SURVEY

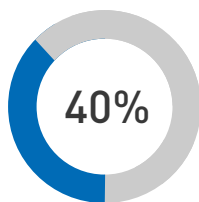
Over 700 AMA members and customers completed the annual Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Survey. Most organizations have been reported to have a D&I policy in place, but there is still a lot of work to do to meet employees' expectations.

Many survey respondents report discrimination in the workplace as well as unconscious bias. A majority of organizations are currently working on a D&I initiative to create a more equal and respectful workplace.

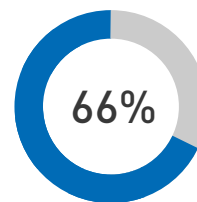
D&I IN THE WORKPLACE



of respondents currently have a D&I policy in their organization



think their D&I policy is being properly implemented

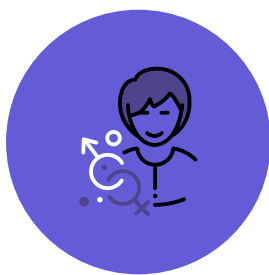


report that their organization is currently focusing on or increasing awareness about D&I

FOR THOSE WORKING ON A NEW INITIATIVE, THE TOP PRIORITIES ARE:



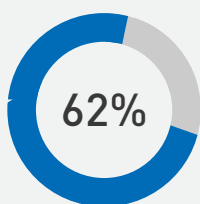
RACE



GENDER



SEXUAL ORIENTATION

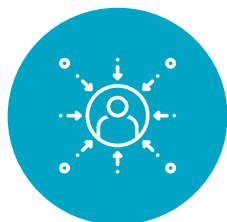


think there is a gap in their organization's D&I practice

DISCRIMINATION



UNCONSCIOUS BIAS



92%

are aware of the concept of unconscious bias



72%

have found themselves guilty of unconscious bias in the workplace



83%

have witnessed unconscious bias by someone else in the workplace

To learn more about individual and organization-wide D&I training

[Learn More](#)

For Real Change in Diversity to Happen, GET UNCOMFORTABLE

BY FREDERICA A. PETERSON

We are at a pivotal time in our society when mortality, human rights, and the examination of our values are converging for our attention.

I have been part of many difficult conversations over the past few months with people searching for answers. Companies are looking for programs and initiatives that will “fix” the diversity and inclusion issue or that will provide HR or training departments with tools to “fix” it so that they can get back to business—and more important, not disrupt the status quo.

And herein lies the problem. We can’t just restructure some departments, change out a few key leadership positions, and revise some policies and expect real change to occur; the truth is that we have to uproot some of our thought processes that drive the decisions that run the business. There is no quick fix to this. It’s like any other gaping wound—it takes time to heal. This is a problem that is deeply ingrained in our culture and our political and business operations.

UNCONSCIOUS THOUGHTS IN THE DRIVER’S SEAT

As much as all these things may be true, the reason why we are in such a dichotomy with diversity and inclusion is because of unconscious thoughts. The unconscious thought I speak of is based on a learning model developed by Noel Burch in the 1970s. It describes the stages that people go through when learning a new skill, which is illustrated through a model titled “The Four Stages of Competence.”

Stage 1: Unconscious Incompetence. “I don’t know what I don’t know.” I will use the example of learning to drive a manual transmission car when I was younger. My brother-in-law had a 1963 VW Beetle with a manual transmission. Everyone in my family knew how to drive a manual car but me. Of course, being the youngest, I wanted to be like my



older family members, so I begged him to teach me how to drive that car. The first time I sat in the driver's seat, I thought to myself, "This is going to be easy." I had been watching him drive for a while, so I thought I knew everything. I was in a state of Unconscious Incompetence.

Stage 2: Conscious Incompetence. "I clearly know what I don't know." In this stage, you recognize there is a gap in your knowledge and are able to identify the skill that needs to be developed. As I attempted to drive the car, we stalled out at least three times before we got moving down the street, and forget it when we got on a hill. Oh boy! I had to learn how to hold the car in place on the hill by engaging the gas with just the right amount of acceleration and releasing the clutch just enough so the car would hold and not roll backward down the hill, or worse, crash into the car behind us! After a few tries, I got the hang of it.

Stage 3: Conscious Competence. "I clearly know, and I can apply my knowledge with concentration and effort." This stage is all about learning and application. Demonstrating the skill requires concentration. Every time I drove the car for the next few months, I had to think about what I was doing. Engage the clutch, turn the key, foot on the gas, engage the clutch, shift the gear...you get the drift. I had to think about everything I was doing.


Stage 4: Unconscious Competence. "I clearly know, and I can apply my knowledge without conscious effort." In this

stage, you are able to do the skill without thinking about it. A high amount of concentration is not required. I was able to get into the car and just drive. I could drive the car, sip my tea, and change stations on the radio without thinking about it. It was ingrained behavior now, meaning I could do it without any effort.

CONSCIOUSLY DEALING WITH UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

Having an understanding of the different stages of competence provides useful perspective when introducing the concept of unconscious bias, which, in my experience, is at the root of most of the underlying issues organizations are faced with today. The "quick fix" many are seeking only complicates the matter when we start considering the unconscious perspective. The people who are on the receiving end of bias are typically in the Unconscious Competence space—meaning they know it exists and are very skilled at dealing with it. It is innate knowledge learned from experience and upbringing. It doesn't mean it's easy to deal with or that it isn't frustrating. It is just their reality.

On May 25, 2020, the death of George Floyd at police hands was caught on video, an incident that shocked many in this nation out of Stage 1: Unconscious Incompetence and into Stage 2: Conscious Incompetence. That was the day it became uncomfortable for so many people because



“Diversity and inclusion expert Vernā Myers says, ‘Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance.’
How many people are you bringing to the dance floor?”

they recognized there is a gap in their knowledge and understanding, and they have to acknowledge the impact unconscious bias has on inequality in this country. Ironically, less than a month later the United States Supreme Court ruled that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in employment.

Some still wonder why there is a push to fix everything to address discrimination. The answer is because having all this knowledge is now uncomfortable. No one knows what to say or how to even begin the dialogue with co-workers, direct reports, and colleagues—and when they do say something, they are not sure if they are being insensitive or misunderstood. The entire situation is uncomfortable. Corporations are panicking that they will lose market share if they don’t put out a statement denouncing discrimination and begin to put some programs together to ensure everyone is embracing diversity.

Unfortunately, this won’t go away by throwing a program at it or making a statement. Don’t get me wrong. These are all good efforts, but they are not enough. For us to get to a place where equality occurs on all levels, we have to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. We have to come up with a plan to move ourselves and the organization from Stage 2: Conscious Incompetence, being fully aware of our gap in knowledge about diversity, to Stage 4: Unconscious Competence, the place where inclusivity is in our DNA.

The best definition I have ever heard for D&I comes from diversity and inclusion expert Vernā Myers. She says, “Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance.” How many people are you bringing to the dance floor?

DISCOMFORT LEADS TO GROWTH

Get comfortable with being uncomfortable so that you can have the conversations needed to gain understanding and knowledge. Being uncomfortable is the foundation of growth. Consider the metamorphosis of a caterpillar to a butterfly. If you have ever watched this process, the stage at which the caterpillar is in the cocoon transforming into the butterfly requires a lot of work. It fights and wriggles and struggles to come out of that cocoon. It is uncomfortable, but in the end

all of that work builds up the strength the butterfly needs to fully transform. If the process were disrupted at any point, the butterfly would die.

Think about it: If we move too fast out of this uncomfortable stage, our efforts will die before change can occur—and over time, if we are not careful, we will watch history repeat itself.

Also consider how much talent are we leaving at the table because of our biases. Whether the bias is based on race, gender, sexual orientation, generation, etc.—“They don’t look like me; they don’t work like me; they don’t think like me; because I refer to ‘them,’ I don’t consider them to be part of ‘us’”—these are examples of unconscious bias. The December 2019 issue of *Human Resource Executive* cites a study that shows companies with diverse management teams are 33% more likely to generate better-than-average profits, are 70% more likely to capture new markets, and generate 19% more revenue from innovation than companies with average leadership diversity.

A few months ago, I released an article titled “Leaders, You Need to Ask the Question” about how to start the conversation. In the article, which is on my LinkedIn page, I wrote that we cannot be afraid to ask a question to gain knowledge and we can’t be so hypersensitive and get offended when someone does. Some of us have to be willing to be vulnerable in order for change to occur.

For most, the workplace is the most diverse place we have exposure to. The acceptance of a few can’t be the norm. The value someone brings to the workplace is not determined by the way they look or how they live their lives; it is by the skills, experience, knowledge, and talent they are bringing to the table. For too long we have valued what is familiar and what is comfortable. We will never see the change we are striving for in the workplace if we can’t get this simple concept. We have to become comfortable with being uncomfortable. **AQ**

Frederica A. Peterson is a leadership consultant, coach, trainer and award-winning author with a passion for leadership effectiveness, who knows leadership is at the heart of team performance. Her consultancy leverages all of her experience to help leaders of small to medium-size corporations sharpen their leadership skills and build high-performing teams. For more information, go to fredericapeterson.com



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Foster Belonging by BRIDGING THE GAP Between Intention and Action

BY MIKAELA KINER



Although some companies have gotten better at creating increasingly diverse teams, that's just a first step.

Bringing in, engaging, and retaining diverse people in your organization requires awareness and preparation. Part of that shift means equipping managers with the right sensibilities and skills to navigate the complexity that leading a diverse team invites.

The stakes are high. When employees don't feel included, when they don't feel a sense of belonging, they're less engaged. They're less productive. They're not happy and, eventually, they leave for greener pastures. That's why, after decades of diversity programs, some leaders are concluding that what they've been doing isn't working. This is a result of bringing people in but not supporting them as full participants in (or members of) the organization. This is where inclusion comes in.

THE MEANING OF INCLUSION FOR WORKING MOMS

Inclusion means being aware that each person who makes up a professional environment comes in with unique strengths, talents, and needs. When a workplace is truly inclusive, everyone feels like they are valued and their needs are being considered. There's a place, for example, to be a working mother without feeling like you have to apologize or explain that you need to balance work and parenting.

Companies that are good for working moms are also good for humans. Working moms often seek out companies that offer support, understanding, and flexibility. Moms want to be part of companies that readily acknowledge people have priorities outside of work and recognize that this does not mean they're any less effective or less committed.

Although companies have talked for decades about trying to foster a sense of inclusion for working moms, very little has changed. Mothers often still have to defend themselves in the workplace, make untenable choices when their families need them, and keep quiet when they have a sick child or school event so others don't write them off. Working moms have to field questions about perceived limitations such as a lack of time, commitment, and focus. More than once, I've heard managers suggest not hiring women who appear to be of parenting age, not hiring pregnant women, firing pregnant women, and limiting travel for moms without asking if this is something they need or want.

Women certainly feel the impact of these conversations. "Now, 72% of moms are employed, either full time or part time, compared with about half in 1968," according to Pew Research

Center's Associate Director of Research Juliana Menasce Horowitz. Her September 2019 article, "Despite challenges at home and work, most working moms and dads say being employed is what's best for them," states that among fathers with kids in the home, the vast majority (89%) are employed full-time, but employed moms (50%) are more likely than employed dads (39%) to say being a working parent makes it harder for them to advance in their job or career.

Working moms are valuable employees who we should proactively mentor and advance. They bring a lot to the table. In fact, a productivity study of highly skilled workers conducted by researchers with the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis in 2014, found that parents were more productive than their counterparts who were not parents. Mothers of two or more children measured as the most productive in the study.

Professional cultures that incorporate real measures to make employees feel included are places where employees can do their best work, individually and on teams. These cultures experience higher engagement and retention because people are well-positioned to stay for the long term.

INCREASING EMPATHY AND ENGAGEMENT

People look for signals about whether they can survive and thrive at work: *Can I speak up for myself here? Can I express disagreement? Will my opinions be heard, valued, and taken seriously?*

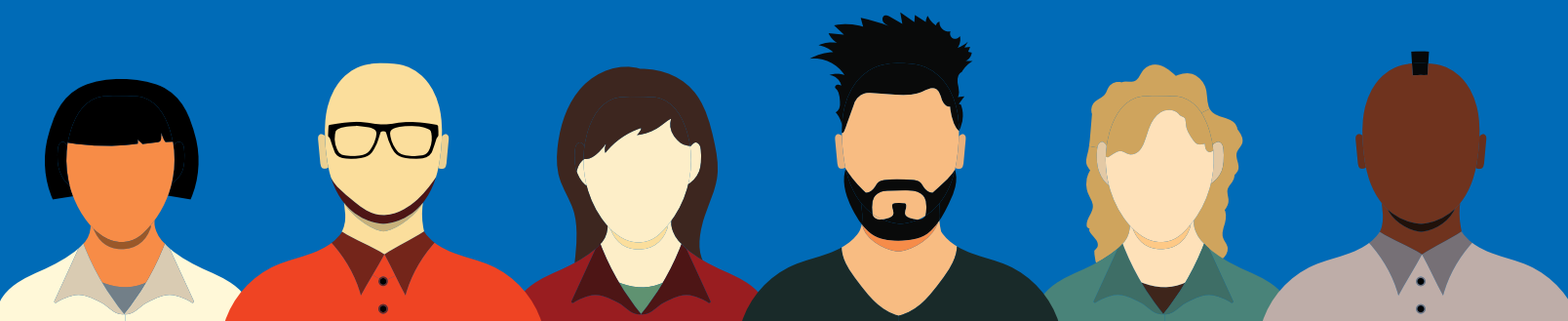
There's uncertainty of belonging at work, especially for those who feel like they're the only one in their professional culture who's like them, the "first and only." Consider the only woman on an all-male team, or the only person of color in an all-white organization.

It becomes a risk to speak up and to see how your company responds. That's a worrisome place to be professionally, and a risk not everyone is willing to take. Ensuring that your employees don't feel this way is part of a manager's job of fostering an inclusive culture. Can everyone speak their minds? Can people of all identities be themselves without risking repercussions?

There can be an empathy gap between intention and action when leaders don't understand the weight of the debate that underestimated employees face: *Can I be a working mom here? Can I safely identify as LGBTQIA+? Can I wear natural hair without being called unprofessional?*

The effort is there: "...Companies are investing in diversity

“Ensuring all members of your team feel included promotes engagement and retention, which yields rich returns for your business.”



programs. In fact, our research in 14 countries shows that 96-98% of large companies (above 1,000 employees) have such programs,” writes Matt Krentz in the February 5, 2019 *Harvard Business Review*. But empathy and connection have been slow to follow. “And yet, despite this investment, we’ve found that around three quarters of employees in underrepresented groups—women, racial and ethnic minorities, and LGBTQ employees—do not feel they’ve personally benefited from their companies’ diversity and inclusion programs,” Krentz adds.

So what can leaders do to take action—and translate their commitment into practice? It starts with shifting your thinking from your own experience to what you want employees on your team to experience.

Leaders need to embrace new thinking and elasticity in how they structure and drive integration across teams to encourage everyone to bring new ideas to the table, and how they recognize everyone’s contributions.

WHAT IF YOU WERE INVESTING FOR THE LONG TERM?

Building a culture of inclusivity is about thinking long term—creating a climate where we’re inviting not just participation but commitment. If we think about how valuable employees become to the organization over time—how much they learn, how much social capital and business knowledge they glean—we might think longer term.

For instance, if I believe I’m hiring an employee only to stick around for a couple of years, then maybe maternity leave seems like it has an outsized impact. But if I plan to develop this person and think about not only their current position but how they’ll benefit the company in the future, then that leave is just a blip.

Retention and equity are both good for business. In fact, a core revelation from McKinsey & Company’s 2015 report “Why Diversity Matters” reveals “that companies in the top quartile for gender or racial and ethnic diversity are more likely to have financial returns above their national industry medians.”

Ensuring all members of your team feel included promotes engagement and retention, which yields rich returns for your business.

MANAGERS NEED NEW TOOLS MORE THAN EVER

Managers are in a tough spot. To their employees, they are the face of the company’s mission and values. Senior leaders can be very thoughtful about the mission and values of a company. But if they aren’t giving frontline managers the right equipment, the right toolkit, to be the face of that message, the message can get lost, leading to cynicism when employees see a disconnect between words and actions.

The skill of management is more than just common sense. Certainly, some managers are naturally equipped with more



“There’s a real pride among Millennial and Gen Z professionals when it comes to culture, differentiation, and the ability to assemble and foster diverse teams.”

charisma and soft skills that help them finesse the job. But there are tools that can help all managers do their work more conscientiously: coaching skills and unconscious bias and advocacy training are a good place to start. You can’t be a successful manager today without these skills, and you can’t hone them without training and practice.

We do managers a disservice when we put them out there, with the responsibility of being the face of the organization’s values in real time, and don’t give them the tools to navigate complex conversations, like those around maternity leave and others that are core to employees’ sense of identity and purpose. These conversations have become table stakes for managers in today’s effective organizations.

MULTIGENERATIONAL DIVERSITY IS INCREASING

Diversity can have additional degrees of nuance among professionals of different generations. Millennials and Gen Zers, for example, are cohorts that have a more diverse makeup than their predecessors. There’s a real pride among professionals of those generations when it comes to culture, differentiation, and the ability to assemble and foster diverse teams. There’s a sense that “I want to be recognized for my unique contributions. That’s a strength. That makes me special.”

And so, if those younger professionals don’t feel that diversity is appreciated and accepted by their more seasoned bosses and colleagues, you see them withdraw or look elsewhere. This can be a challenge for managers who may find that some of their Baby Boomer or Gen X staff may be less accustomed to a style that expects less conformity and welcomes individuality.

SUSTAINING INCLUSIVE CULTURE

Managers can’t do it alone. Culture means “all of us.” If a culture is truly inclusive, that ethos has to be sustained among employees, not just proclaimed by leaders.

Initiatives such as employee resource groups (ERG) help foster community and cohesion among employees. In the past, these groups often happened outside of work hours on people’s own time. But recently, ERGs have emerged as a wonderful opportunity for the company to show its commitment. What better way to show that you want to learn and improve than to sponsor and fund ERGs?

Fostering camaraderie and creating space for everyone role models inclusion. Senior leaders can help managers foster a healthy culture by providing them the training and support they need to be the face of their company’s cultural initiatives. From interviewing to onboarding, training, and creating a safe space, managers are a key conduit when it comes to employees’ success and happiness in their jobs.

Inclusion is an important goal for every company. It tells people “You belong here because you’re you. There’s a place for you here, where you can be yourself, fully and freely.” Inclusion earns us a sense of belonging. It’s vital and worthy work. [AQ](#)

Mikaela Kiner is the founder of Reverb, a Seattle-based consultancy focused on people operations. She spent 15 years in HR leadership roles at local companies including Microsoft, Starbucks, Amazon, PopCap Games, and Redfin. She serves on the board of Businesses Ending Slavery and Trafficking (BEST) and is passionate about Seattle startups, inclusive culture, and coaching high-potential leaders. Kiner is the author of Female Firebrands: Stories and Techniques to Ignite Change, Take Control, and Succeed in the Workplace (Greenleaf Book Group, January 2020).

10 WAYS TO MOVE BEYOND D&I TRAINING

BY CHRISTINE ANDRUKONIS

By now, most of us recognize the business and human imperative of creating an inclusive world and an inclusive workplace.

But few have achieved it. And even fewer have gone beyond inclusion and addressed inequity—a problem that’s been a part of our culture for as long as our culture has existed.

Some companies have started to truly address inequity. Many have initiated training programs. And yes, training is a critical activity. But there’s so much more that needs to be done to drive real, lasting change. Here are 10 actions that take diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) efforts beyond training to help build a truly equitable workplace.

Admit you have a problem or opportunity to improve. If you or someone you know has ever taken part in an addiction recovery program, you know that the first step is to admit you have a problem. Essentially, you must acknowledge that the status quo is not working and that you need help. This step is about making an honest realization that change is needed and that there must be a better way forward.

This goes for DE&I as well. If your organization is going to make real moves toward a truly diverse, inclusive, and equitable culture, you must be ready to admit that the current “way” isn’t working and acknowledge that it’s time to let go of the past and try something new and different.

Listen to learn. According to social psychologist Irving L. Janis, groupthink is a psychological phenomenon in which people strive for consensus within a group and will even set aside their own personal beliefs or adopt the opinion of the rest of the group. It is a phenomenon that is most likely to occur when group members are very similar to one another, and when a powerful and charismatic leader is in charge or a group is placed under extreme stress or a moral dilemma.

Although some praise groupthink because it can result in faster decision making or task completion, many find it dangerous because it can lead to suppression of individual and creative thought, poor decision making, and inefficient problem solving. To combat groupthink, people need to invite the opinions of others, especially others who are different from themselves. And once other voices are heard, the group must encourage debate and discourse about next steps forward. This will maximize learning and ensure optimal decision making and problem solving.

Get comfortable being uncomfortable. In the words of well-known abolitionist Frederick Douglass, “If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want



crops without plowing up the ground; they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters.”

The same goes for those of us who want truly diverse, inclusive, and equitable work environments without ever hearing about others’ racist experiences, without taking accountability for the ills of our society and for our personal biases and contributions to these ills. We must lean into the ugliness of inequity and exclusion and come to terms with the role we’ve played in creating the current environment. We must be prepared to take risks, say the wrong thing, and make mistakes sometimes if we are going to change the tone and the narrative in the world around us.

Think bigger. Teaching employees about diversity concepts, like institutional racism, personal bias, and microaggressions, is the type of (often well-intended) tick-the-box approach that ultimately is just not enough to sustain a culture that truly supports and values diversity, equity, and inclusion.

A more holistic approach—one rooted in a shared vision and based on the individual experiences of those within the organization—drives the mindset shift and behavior change required to create this environment. It infuses DE&I into the values, governance, talent, compensation, and other practices of an organization. It holds every member of the organization accountable to understand their role and build new habits.

Visualize what good looks like and measure it. Articulating what success looks like can help create a picture of what you’re looking to achieve, and a vision that feels both real and

possible. It’s certainly not magic or a replacement for the planning and hard work that go into realizing the vision, but it can put you in the right mindset to set the vision in motion.

Then, based on what success looks like day-to-day, create a transparent scorecard to measure progress and success against your DE&I initiatives and goals. When determining your metrics, be sure to measure not just the presence of a more diverse workforce vis-à-vis hiring, retention, and other metrics, but also whether each member of your organization feels included and valued and has access to the same opportunities and resources as those around them.

Convert doubters to doers. People who have doubts about the ability to change can actually be your biggest allies in the journey toward a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive work culture. But you have to meet them where they are, address their concerns (which are often quite valid), and earn their trust and support for the future.

Working with doubters can be exhausting, especially when you’re facing a difficult challenge. The last thing you want to see or hear are doubts, and doubts can be particularly emotional when it comes to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion—especially for the believers among us. But in the spirit of honoring others’ reality, ask questions of the doubters and listen to their answers. Work with them to co-create a path forward and inspire them to take action—and you’ll move them along the change continuum to shift from awareness, through commitment, to action and advocacy.

Change HR practices. You can communicate with, train, and convert those around you to create momentum for change, and you’ll make great progress. But if you want to

“There is no magic bullet to building a strategic approach to creating a more equitable and diverse culture. Some actions are simpler to implement, others are longer-term efforts.”



maintain progress well into the future, nearly every HR policy and practice must be reevaluated from the lens of DE&I, across the entire employee lifecycle. From recruiting and onboarding through learning and development, performance management, talent planning, compensation and recognition programs, every HR practice must encourage and reinforce a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Activate sponsors. Build inclusive and equitable mentorship programs that increase visibility and accelerate growth for traditionally underrepresented groups. More important, activate career sponsors across your organization. These are people who will be more proactive in helping others advance their careers. They are influential leaders who openly and privately advocate for others' success, often recommending them for highly visible or stretch assignments, supporting them in risk taking, and helping them build relationships with key influencers. Sponsors take a vested interest in others' careers and help confront and interrupt bias along the way. Sponsorship is earned through trust and credibility but must be encouraged, expected, and rewarded across the organization.

Harness the power of the collective. Helen Keller, American author, political activist, and lecturer, and the first deaf-blind person to earn a bachelor's degree, once said, "Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much," imploring people to lean on each other for help, especially in the context of a social movement. Helen Keller was, among many wonderful things, an advocate for the disabled. She dedicated her life to the rights of the disabled and spent countless hours supporting social justice among other groups as well. In all her efforts, she emphasized the power of the collective.

Similarly, in organizations, it is important to create and nourish active, well-resourced employee networks, resource groups, and councils. By bringing employees together to share, listen, and strategize about how to

address issues of diversity, inclusion, and equity, you will harness the power of the collective to strengthen culture and get better results.

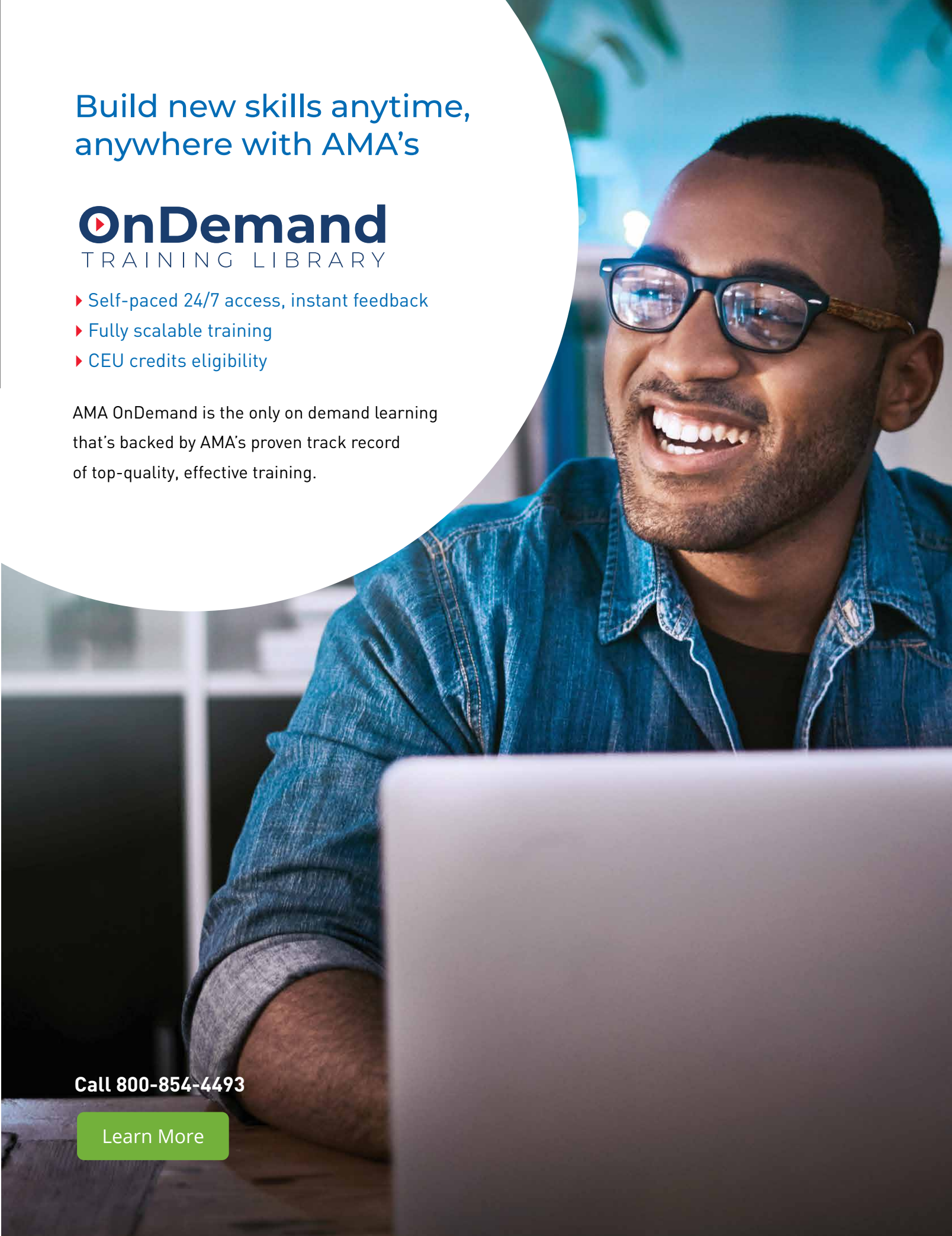
Build and sustain energy at every level. To ensure comprehensive adoption and lasting culture change, initiatives must be aimed at addressing the short- and long-term needs of every level in the organization, which can be viewed as four separate energy centers:

- The C-suite
- The magic middle (those middle layers of leaders that sit in the pivotal role between employees and executives)
- The manager-coaches (who have employees reporting directly to them)
- The frontline employees, serving customers and clients every day

There is no magic bullet to building a strategic approach to creating a more equitable and diverse culture. Some of the actions above are simpler to implement than others and these can be tackled immediately. Others are longer-term efforts that will take energy to implement and sustain. Still, all of these tactics are necessary to help you transcend the rhetoric of DE&I training and move into tangible action and lasting change within the organization.

Be bold. Be honest. Be humble. And most of all, be patient. Remember, you are tackling issues that are hundreds of years old. But as we advise our clients every day, now is the time to lift up and inspire others with a clear vision for the future, dig in to the hard work of change with confidence and calm, and lead forward by mobilizing your teams to create a better tomorrow. **AQ**

Christine Andrukonis is the founder and senior partner at Notion Consulting, a global change-leadership consultancy.



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D&I in the Workplace: A LEGAL PERSPECTIVE

BY BENJAMIN E. WIDENER, ESQ.

While the important initiative of diversity and inclusion in the workplace has received more public attention recently, it has been a crucial part of the work environment for longer than you might think.

"If I have to do this, based on stereotypes that are totally untrue, and that I do not agree with, you would maybe not be a very good driver..." is the clue provided by the character of Pam to Dwight during a cultural awareness exercise featured in the second episode, "Diversity Day," of the sitcom *The Office*, which aired on March 29, 2005. Through satire, the show emphasized the importance of promoting cultural diversity, inclusiveness, individuality, and equality in the workplace. It also highlighted how our viewpoints are influenced by stereotypes and our own unconscious bias.

Though diversity and inclusion have become core competencies in HR, and while the importance of the D&I initiative in employment has become generally accepted, the D&I initiative is not rooted in the law.

WHAT THE LAW ACTUALLY SAYS

Federal law prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, childbirth, and related medical conditions), disability, age (40 and older),

citizenship, genetic information, and national origin.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 specifically makes it an unlawful employment practice for any employer to:

- Refuse to hire or fire any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions or privileges of employment, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin; or
- Limit, segregate or classify its employees or applicants in any way that would deprive any individual of employment opportunities or adversely affect his/her status as an employee, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin

The terms "diversity" and "inclusion" do not appear in Title VII, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, or the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Many states have promulgated their own anti-discrimination analogs and, in doing so, have expanded on the classes and



characteristics protected under state law. For example, the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination prohibits unlawful discrimination or harassment in employment based on race, creed, color, national origin, nationality, ancestry, sex, pregnancy, breastfeeding, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, familial status, marital status, domestic partnership/civil union status, liability for military service, and in some cases, atypical hereditary cellular or blood trait, genetic information and age. The California Department of Fair Employment and Housing similarly enforces laws that protect employees against illegal discrimination in harassment based on these same protected classes. Recently, many states have passed their own iterations of the Crown Act, which ensures protection against discrimination based on hair texture or protective styles. Many of these state statutes are designed to foster inclusion and diversity in the workplace. None of these statutes, however, specifically reference or include either of those key terms.

THE LEGAL IMPORTANCE OF D&I POLICIES

Though there may not be any statutory or legal mandate for D&I in the workplace, there are many places where D&I intersects with the law.

First and foremost, employers should adopt written D&I policies and should strengthen their equal employment opportunity and anti-harassment policies and procedures to include D&I training and education. While courts have not yet required employers to have D&I policies to avail themselves of affirmative defenses to employee hostile work

environment claims, such a requirement could be on the horizon, particularly in more progressive jurisdictions.

Under federal law, it is well-settled that an employer may have an affirmative defense to employee claims of supervisor or co-worker sexual harassment (and other discrimination claims) where the employer has taken steps to eradicate discrimination from the workplace by:

- Promulgating an anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policy;
- Providing anti-harassment training and education for all employees;
- Having an effective and practical grievance procedure for aggrieved and/or whistle-blower employees; and
- Strictly enforcing these policies

Employers must have policies and procedures, but also must insist on effective enforcement to “practice what they preach” to avail themselves of this affirmative defense. D&I training can—and should—be implemented in tandem with anti-harassment and anti-discrimination training. Employers can—and should—establish interrelated EEO, anti-discrimination, and D&I policies and procedures for their workforce to follow. While this may not be required by law, it is only a matter of time before this becomes the rule, not the exception.

CODE OF CONDUCT MAKES A CASE

For example, in the 2016 case of *Williams v. E. I. DuPont de Nemours & Co.*, filed in the United States District Court for



“This is the tip of the iceberg in how courts might recognize and, in time, set precedent about the importance of inclusion and diversity in the workplace.”

the Western District of Tennessee, an employee alleged claims of harassment discrimination and retaliation in violation of Title VII. The court dismissed the complaint, observing that DuPont had a “Code of Conduct” and a “Respect for People” policy by which all employees were bound. Both the Code of Conduct and the Respect for People policies included DuPont’s initiatives and practices related to diversity and inclusion, equal opportunity and non-discrimination, people treatment, non-retaliation and freedom from harassment, among other things. The stated objective thereof was to “[s]trongly encourage those who believe they have been subjected to harassment, retaliation, discrimination or mistreatment, to report any such incidents for appropriate management action.” To that end, the Code of Conduct and Respect for People policies both detail DuPont’s reporting and investigation process for reported mistreatment.

The court noted that employers are not automatically liable for sexual harassment perpetrated by their employees and employer liability “depends on the plaintiff showing the employer knew (or reasonably should have known) about the harassment but failed to take appropriate remedial action.” While not central to the court’s holding, the court’s reference to DuPont’s Respect for People policy and DuPont’s diversity and inclusion policies reflects that the court considered DuPont’s D&I policies and procedures, as well as DuPont’s adherence to those policies and execution of those procedures, in rendering its decision dismissing the complaint. This is the tip of the iceberg in how courts might recognize and, in time, set precedent about the importance of inclusion and diversity in the workplace.

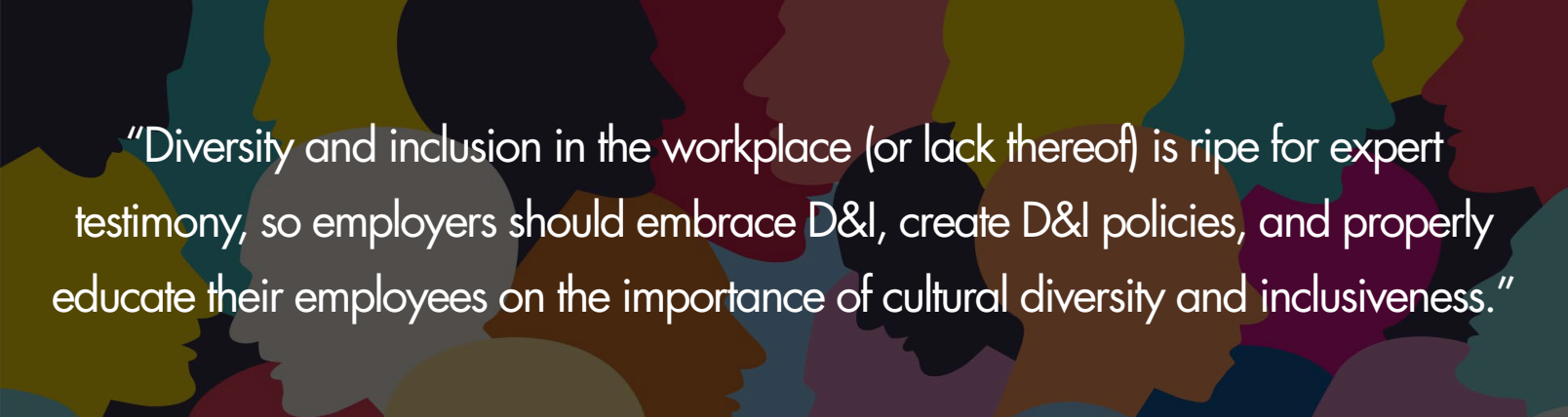
EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION AND THE LEGAL ROLE OF EXPERTS

Another way in which D&I intersects with employment law is through the proffer of expert testimony in employment discrimination cases, as demonstrated by the 2019 case of *Haydar v. Amazon Corp., LLC*, filed in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan. Haydar, the employee, alleged discrimination on the basis of his Syrian descent and because he was Muslim. He contended his supervisor’s repeated reference to “you people...,” supported his claim of disparate treatment. Amazon maintained that Haydar’s national origin and religion had nothing to do with the termination of his employment, but that he was fired for failing to follow company rules.

At trial, Haydar hoped to introduce evidence through the expert testimony of Donna Marie Blancero, PhD, who would opine about bias against Muslims, unconscious bias, the differences between “diversity” and “inclusion” in the workplace, and the proper procedures for investigating an employee’s complaint, among other things. Amazon challenged the admission of Dr. Blancero’s testimony on various grounds, such as flawed methodology and insufficient data. In large part, the court agreed with Amazon and excluded Dr. Blancero’s testimony from introduction at trial. However, the court permitted Dr. Blancero to opine on the “Culture of Lack of Inclusion” section of her expert report. The court felt this part of her expert opinion fell “solidly within her expertise” and that even if the “typical juror is familiar with the difference between diversity and inclusion, the reliability of Blancero’s testimony ensures that the only prejudice is a bit of trial time, not misinformation.”



“Another way in which D&I intersects with employment law is through the proffer of expert testimony in employment discrimination cases.”



“Diversity and inclusion in the workplace (or lack thereof) is ripe for expert testimony, so employers should embrace D&I, create D&I policies, and properly educate their employees on the importance of cultural diversity and inclusiveness.”

The Haydar case demonstrates how D&I can become relevant to a case through the introduction of expert testimony. Courts are divided about whether testimony of this type of evidence (on stereotyping, unconscious bias, and the social sciences of diversity and inclusion) is admissible or not. On the one hand, courts that exclude this testimony tend to reason that data about unconscious stereotyping is too far removed from carefully considered, case-specific employment decisions to be helpful to juries, and they draw distinctions between unconscious stereotyping and “intentional discrimination” required to make out a Title VII claim. On the other hand, courts that allow this testimony note that jurors are not necessarily knowledgeable about these issues and hold that the testimony can give jurors a context within which to evaluate the evidence. Whether relevant and admissible or not, employers and their legal counsel are facing new challenges with respect to the introduction of D&I expert testimony and evidence in employment cases, which could create exposure to liability and drive up litigation costs.

PROTECTION OF DIVERSITY INITIATIVES IN COURT

Another nexus between D&I in the workplace and the law can be found in the exchange of discovery in employment discrimination cases. For example, in *Moussouris v. Microsoft Corp.*, filed in the United States District Court for the Western District of Washington in 2016, former Microsoft employees alleged gender-based employment discrimination against the company. Microsoft deemed confidential and proprietary certain documents, including diversity initiatives, exchanged in the course of discovery in the action.

According to Microsoft, diversity and inclusion was a business imperative. It argued its diversity initiatives were the equivalent of trade secrets for its business operations that gave the company an advantage over its competitors. Microsoft argued these initiatives helped build an “emotional connection” its employees needed to demonstrate high levels of commitment and contribution. Microsoft also explained that its ability to foster greater diversity in the workforce and to recruit top diverse talent in a highly competitive labor market was imperative to its success. Thus, Microsoft argued that its diversity initiatives, strategies, and representation data must be afforded the utmost

protection and secrecy (and be filed under seal with the court) to prevent competitors from unjustly gaining access to these strategies and, in turn, recruiting Microsoft’s talent.

The court found Microsoft’s argument that its diversity initiatives, data, and strategies were trade secrets to be very persuasive and supported by the facts, and thus they were afforded due protection and confidentiality. While not directly related to the importance of diversity and inclusion in the workplace, this case is instructive on how diversity and inclusion efforts and data can be used, treated, and protected by employers, and also how that information can—and likely will—become the subject of discovery in an employment discrimination case.

STAY AHEAD OF THE LAW WHEN IT COMES TO D&I

There are many good reasons why an employer should build a diverse and inclusive workplace and create a harmonious environment for its workforce. This includes legal reasons that, while perhaps not yet mandated, may be considered by judges and juries in evaluating employment-related claims. Indeed, in time, whether an employer has adopted, effectively implemented, and actually honored its D&I policies could be integral to a harassment, discrimination, or hostile work environment case analysis.

In addition, D&I data and employee demographics may be discoverable in employment discrimination cases and, therefore, employers should take appropriate measures to safeguard this proprietary information. Lastly, diversity and inclusion in the workplace (or lack thereof) is ripe for expert testimony, so employers should embrace D&I in the workplace, create D&I policies, properly educate their employees on the importance of cultural diversity and inclusiveness, and maintain records of these practices, procedures, and D&I data to support (or refute) expert testimony in employment litigation. ^{AQ}

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EDUCATION

The Key to Diversity and Inclusion Training

BY MICHAEL BACH



Diversity and inclusion have become buzzwords. We hear them used by CEOs and world leaders in casual conversation, yet decades have passed since the Civil Rights movement began, and the “face” of leadership hasn’t changed much.

So why haven’t we been able to make more progress toward an inclusive society where everyone has the same opportunity to succeed? What has been holding us back?

There’s a long list of things I could point to, but one of the biggest gaps I see (and one of those infamous “quick wins”) is education. It’s not just that there is a woeful lack of educating going on. *How* the education is being executed—and in fact how the education is *perceived*—is the real problem.

ONE AND DONE

First on the list of issues is that the approach to education on diversity and inclusion (D&I) is traditionally “one and done.” We put everyone through a voluntary program and we’re good, right? This is what I like to refer to as “wrong.”

The first mistake is that your employee population isn’t static. The average employee turnover rate is about 18%, but that can be a lot higher in some industries (such as food service or retail). By the time you’ve trained everyone, you need to start back at the beginning to capture the new people. And that cycle continues endlessly.

Education should be part of onboarding. From the day a person starts, there should be mandatory D&I education driven by a D&I learning map that takes each person through a learning journey. Use a blended learning approach—eLearning to establish a foundation (because it’s cheap, sustainable, and can be done at a person’s own pace) followed by instructor-led training to build from there.

The second mistake in the “one and done” approach is the idea that one program covers it all. If #BlackLivesMatter has shown us anything, it’s that we have a lot of work to do to educate people on anti-Black and systemic racism. And that’s just one topic. The conversation around D&I is constantly evolving, and so should your education program.

Start with good old-fashioned diversity and inclusion fundamentals (what diversity and inclusion mean and why they are important in your organization) and build from

there to more complex topics such as unconscious bias and intercultural competence. From there, you can (must) go on to antiracism education (and this should be a series, not a single course), LGBTQ2+ inclusion, and so on. There are a lot of identities under the pan-diversity umbrella, and they all have different considerations. Think of it like putting all your employees through a certificate program in D&I and keep layering things on as you go.

You might also want to develop some form of assessment tool to customize the learning map for each person. Everyone joining your organization will have a different level of experience with diversity and inclusion. Don’t force people to go through the D&I fundamentals when they’ve already had years of D&I training. An assessment tool ensures that each person gets relevant learning for them. And before you Google it, such a tool does not currently exist. Yet. (My organization is working on it.)

PREACHING TO THE CHOIR

This one is so wrong it gets its own heading: voluntary. Many times, I have delivered training when it’s voluntary and I find myself in a room full of smiling faces nodding at every word I say. While I love my fans, the problem is you don’t need to preach to the choir. You need to be preaching to the back row.

The problem with “voluntary” is that you’re only speaking to one side of the fence. I present a model in my book, *Birds of All Feathers: Doing Diversity and Inclusion Right* called the Five Fs (see next page).

You can likely figure out what each of them means. When delivering “voluntary” training, you end up with an audience that is made up of “family,” “friends,” and the occasional “fence-sitter.” The problem is that what you really need is an audience of “fence-sitters,” “foes,” and “fighters.” They’re the ones you really need to educate.

Education programs on D&I should not be “voluntary” or “strongly encouraged.” Make them mandatory for all. If you really want to affect change in your organization, you have to make sure you take everyone along on the journey.

“You must educate everyone. Every single employee, from the top of the house to the bottom, needs to go through the same education program. There’s no way to tell who needs the education and who doesn’t, so you must make everyone go through it.”



EVERYONE IN THE TENT

Sadly, it’s not always easy to find the people in your organization who are racist/sexist/homophobic/transphobic/anti-whatever.

That being the case, you must educate everyone. Every single employee, from the top of the house to the bottom, needs to go through the same education program. There’s no way to tell who needs the education and who doesn’t, so you must make everyone go through it.

It’s also important to note that I’m not delusional (enough) to believe that forcing people into D&I training is going to fix their racist/sexist/homophobic/transphobic/anti-whatever behavior, but I like to think of D&I education as a marathon, not a sprint. Again, it’s not a one and done. You have to take learners on a journey of discovery, not just about other people, but about themselves. That takes time.

EDUCATION DOESN’T HAVE TO BE LONG

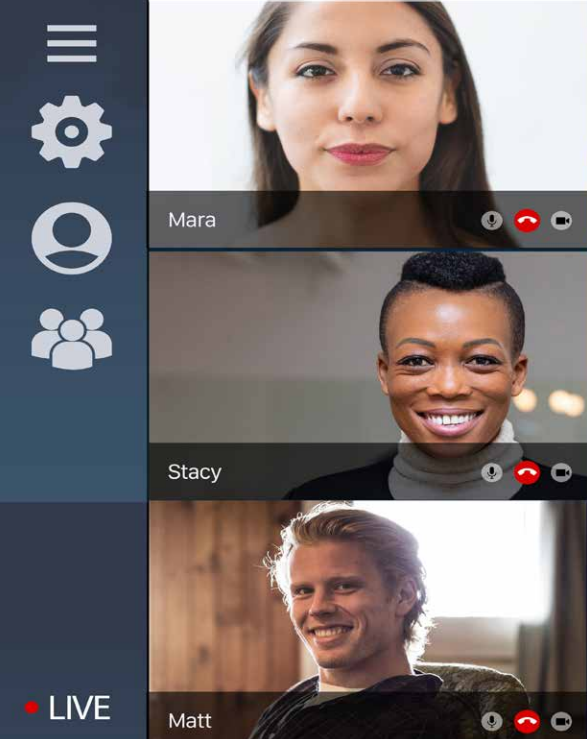
When leaders hear “education,” they usually think, “I’m going to have to pay people to take time off work to attend this.”

Yes and no. Although a half day with me is super-fun, it’s not necessarily practical to put all your people through that form of training.

You can keep your education short and concise. As I already suggested, blended learning is a great way to educate people. Start with a series of short eLearning courses that can have a similar (but not the same) outcome as instructor-led training. It’s also far more cost-effective and sustainable and is easier to roll out to your entire organization.

From there, you can introduce short instructor-led training sessions (which can easily be done virtually) for some or all of your employees and build on their knowledge. The advantage to instructor-led training is that it allows for a much higher level of interactivity and discussion, which engages people’s brains in a different way. eLearning is great for covering the fundamentals of a topic—think of it like an information push—but it doesn’t allow for that engaged conversation where the real learning happens.

That said, yes you should be paying your people to learn something that you want them to learn. Do you pay them to



take safety and/or compliance training? Then you should pay them to take D&I training.

LEARNING IS EVERYWHERE

Structured learning is one thing, but unstructured learning is equally valuable. There are so many ways that we learn: reading a book, watching a television show or movie, listening to a podcast, or having a conversation. They're all ways to expand your understanding of other people's experiences.

For example, if you're looking to learn how to be an antiracist, why not read *How to Be an Antiracist* (One World, 2019) by Ibram X. Kendi. Or, if you're not quite ready for that, how about *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (Beacon Press, 2018) by Robin DiAngelo and Michael Eric Dyson. Both are fantastic reads and really informative. And that's what learning can be.

From a workplace perspective, at the beginning of every team meeting, you could have a "diversity moment" when someone shares something about themselves to help educate their co-workers on the diversity that exists around them. Or how about a workplace book club where you read, let's say, *Birds of All Feathers: Doing Diversity and Inclusion Right*, and have a team discussion.

FOCUS ON LEADERS

I've said it before, and I'll say it again: Tone from the top is critical. If your leaders don't understand the value of diversity and inclusion, you won't get anywhere. You need them not only to buy in but also to take ownership of the journey.

More often than not, a leader's perceptions of the organization are not in line with the employees' lived

experiences. Leaders tend to not be fully aware of what's going on, particularly if they aren't members of an underrepresented group. I've seen situations in which leaders think the organization is perfect—there's no sexism, racism, homophobia, and so on. And then the employees' feedback reveals a dramatically different reality. The bigger the organization, the less likely its leaders will be attuned to the day-to-day, lived experience of its people.

Leaders need as much education as anyone else. Their learning programs should cover all the same information you push out to the rest of the organization, but they should also focus on a leader's role in creating an inclusive workplace. Their learning should be delivered in a safe space where they can be vulnerable and not feel like their staff will look at them differently. Or, as I like to say it, a place where they can safely stick their foot in their mouth.

We don't know what we don't know. If you've never been Black, you may have little understanding of what that lived experience is like. And that's OK. As a white man, I will never experience anti-Black racism. But I can learn and empathize.

Where we are today isn't any one person's problem, and it certainly isn't going to be fixed by a single person either. The only way we're going to address the problems we're facing is for everyone to have a better understanding of those issues, and to figure out their role in creating inclusive workplaces. And the only way we'll get there is through education. ^{AQ}

*Michael Bach is CEO of the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion, and the author of *Birds of All Feathers: Doing Diversity and Inclusion Right* (Page Two, 2020).*

DIVERSITY

and

INCLUSION

Challenges in Talent Acquisition and Management

BY NANCY HUCKABA

Diversity and inclusion are an ever more important part of our society.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2019, for the first time in U.S. history, nonwhites and Hispanics were the majority of people under the age of 16. The Census Bureau reported in June that this demographic shift is expected to increase even further over the next few decades.

In 2019, nearly 40% of the total U.S. population was either nonwhite or Hispanic. According to the Pew Research Center in February 2008 and the Brookings Institution in March 2018, it is estimated that non-Hispanic whites will be a minority of the U.S. population by 2045.

Diversity—as it relates to the workplace—is both inherent (such as age, race) and acquired (such as education, experience). Diversity can include race, color, ethnicity, gender, age, physical ability, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, education level, urban or rural background, religious and political beliefs, nationality of origin, and work experience.

If an organization is focused only on a number or checking a box for diversity, it will be on the defensive and only look at issues that come to light in terms of compliance.

AIM FOR INCLUSION

According to “The No. 1 Strategy for True Inclusion in the Workplace,” a February 2019 post from Gallup, “Wide demographics alone won’t make a difference to an organization’s bottom line unless the people within those demographics feel authentically welcomed.”

Inclusion changes the narrative by turning the focus to a positive viewpoint. It is a more authentic way to value people, their skill sets, and their diversity of backgrounds. In an inclusive environment, all employees feel welcomed, respected, heard, and encouraged. Employees are appreciated for their strengths as well as their differences. Inclusion is a lofty goal but one that engages employees to bring their “best selves” to their managers, colleagues, and customers/clients.

The enemy of inclusion is unconscious bias, which 100% of people have. To shift the culture of the organization and

hire top, diverse talent, bias must be addressed. Project Implicit is a series of “implicit association tests” (IAT) started at Harvard University in 1998. It has been shown to identify participants’ unconscious biases about other demographic groups. For inclusion to succeed in any organization, it is essential that all employees acknowledge their own biases.

D&I: THE FUTURE OF BUSINESS

Data from McKinsey’s May 2020 study of 1,000 large businesses in 15 countries show 25% higher revenues for companies with diversity in the leadership ranks. The addition of inclusion also results in higher retention rates at all levels.

To attract top diverse talent, an organization must be genuine in the quest for equity and inclusion. D&I training and education are essential for leadership, human resources, and hiring managers.

People naturally tend to hire others who look and think like themselves. When hiring people with a different perspective or viewpoint, creativity increases and problem solving becomes a group activity. An inclusive group can identify innovations and pitfalls that a homogenous type of groupthink cannot accomplish. Better solutions are achieved when you are not relying on a single narrative.

Diversity should also include political affiliations. In 2013, professors of management Denise Lewin Loyd of the University of Illinois, Cynthia Wang of Oklahoma State University, Robert B. Lount Jr. of Ohio State University, and Katherine W. Phillips of Columbia University asked 186 people to self-disclose whether they were a Democrat or Republican. They all read a murder mystery and decided who they thought committed the crime. Then, the researchers asked each subject to write an essay defending their viewpoint and why they came to the conclusion that they did. They were paired with a Republican or Democrat to discuss their thoughts. All participants were told that their partner disagreed with them and they needed to come to an agreement with the other person during the meeting. They



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Organizations need a workforce comfortable in speaking out to educate colleagues in order to have a positive influence on branding, products, and marketing.

needed to convince their partner they were correct. Half of the subjects were told that they would be making their case to someone who was a member of the opposing political party, and half were told that they would be making their case to a member of their own political party.

What they found was that when any self-identifying Democrat was told that a fellow Democrat disagreed with them, they prepared less well for the discussion than Democrats who were told that a Republican disagreed with them. Republicans showed the exact same pattern. When disagreement came from a socially different person, they were prompted to think and work harder. Diversity awakens us to stronger cognitive action in ways that uniformity does not.

BUYERS USE THEIR VOICES

National trends in demographics show increased buying power from minorities and amplified influence both socially and politically. Organizations need a workforce that is comfortable in speaking out to educate colleagues in order to have a positive influence on branding, products, and marketing. Leadership needs to be open when asking the difficult questions, listening, and taking action.

Trader Joe's in July 2020 was asked by some customers to repackage products that were deemed racist. In the hot seat are ethnic food brand names such as Trader Ming's, Trader José, Arabian Joe, Trader Giotto's, and Trader Joe San. A Change.org petition was signed by thousands of people in a matter of hours. However, the company is still considering the requests. "We want to be clear: we disagree that any of these labels are racist. We do not make decisions based on petitions," the company stated on its website on July 24.

Unlike Trader Joe's, other companies have changed branding in response to consumer pressure and recent racial unrest. These include Quaker Oats' decision to rename its Aunt Jemima brand in June, Conagra Brands' rebranding and

repackaging of Mrs. Butterworth syrup, and Mars Inc.'s revamping of its Uncle Ben's brand of rice. Perhaps an argument can be made that the recent changes in all noted companies might not have been necessary if diverse leaders and employees had felt safe enough to speak up earlier in the company's history.

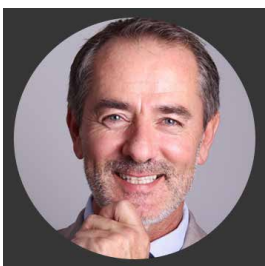
COMPLIANCE FORCING HIRING CHANGES

Another reason an organization should look at D&I is compliance. Government contracts call for diversity in organizations. To work successfully with minority-owned or women-owned businesses, contractors must have diversity in their employee ranks. To attract top, diverse talent, companies must have an inclusive environment. In addition to everything mentioned above, it is also the right thing to do even if not required by contracts and partners.

We've all heard that the best way to get hired is to know someone in an organization. That's fine, but in most cases it does not lead to diversity. A big step toward moving the needle in terms of diversity is hiring people you don't know and going to where the candidates "live." This may consist of going outside of your comfort zone, circle of influence, and/or social circle. It may mean looking through a diversity lens for every hire.

Depending on the industry or position, a diverse top candidate or hire may be difficult to find. HBCUs (historically black colleges and universities) and their alumni groups are a wonderful place to recruit. Hispanic, Disability, LGBTQ, and Black Chambers of Commerce are also fantastic resources for potential candidates.

Affinity professional associations or LinkedIn groups are another source of diverse candidates. Examples of these are the National Black MBA Association (NBMBAA), the Executive Leadership Council (ELC), the Association of Latino Professionals for America (ALPFA), the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda (NHLA), the American Association



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Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, women are twice as likely as men to sacrifice their careers and leave the workforce.

of People with Disabilities (AAPD), Disability:IN, Equality Federation-Leadership Connection, the National Association for Female Executives (NAFE), and the National Hispanic Corporate Council (NHCC). Many of these and other groups have local or state level entities as well as an online presence.

In my firm's bi-state region of Kansas and Missouri, we have a Diversity and Inclusion Consortium; there are many others across the United States.

BARRIERS TO FINDING, RETAINING DIVERSE CANDIDATES

In a recent retained executive search, a diverse top candidate was not interested in moving their family to an area with a smaller and/or nonexistent diverse population. An employer needs to know and be able to connect candidates to diversity in the organization and the community. Another top candidate wanted to know whether there were health benefits for their same-sex partner and if the community was LGBTQ family-friendly before exploring the position. Your search firm or internal recruiter should have the answers to those questions at the first contact.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, women are twice as likely as men to sacrifice their careers and leave the workforce, according to WerkLabs, the research division of The Mom Project, in June. These experts say it is usually the challenge of balancing home schooling and childcare with working a 40- to 60-hour workweek that causes the turnover.

In a pre-pandemic executive search, in which my team was looking for an entrepreneur, a top female candidate with small children turned down the offer when the president was not willing to be flexible with a traditional Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. workweek. He thought it would set an inappropriate precedent for all employees if anyone ever chose to work remotely. A command-and-control type of leadership has never really driven productivity. The pandemic has shown that people can be productive even when they're not in the office. It is the engagement that matters; engaged workers are always more productive.

The online learning company Chegg surveyed staff at the height of the pandemic in the spring of 2020; 86% of employees said their productivity was as good as or better than before they worked from home, according to a June 23, 2020 article in the *New York Times*. They attributed the uptick

to not commuting and not having boundaries to the workday. The Chegg team completed a project in 15 days that would have taken a month during normal times. The executive leaders were trying to be high-touch early in the pandemic; after feeling burnt out themselves, they stepped back.

Many Millennials and Gen Xers do not want to work an 80-hour week. They want a more balanced life. A majority of Millennials also want to work for a company that is socially responsible within their community. It can also be important to them to regularly volunteer for a local charity during work hours.

Job descriptions should be written, and edited after they are written, to attract diverse candidates. Sourcing and recruiting is best when it is done in tandem, not in sequence. Many search consultants and recruiters lack the confidence to push back with biased clients or leaders. There should be diversity and cultural competency on the recruiting and interviewing team.

Assessments should be an insignificant part of the hiring process and should tell you what you already know about the candidate from interviews, work history, and professional references. According to an article in SHRM's *HR Magazine*, "In researching personality assessment tools, HR professionals should ask vendors for the technical documentation that shows what the test was designed to measure, what group it was tested with and what workplace behaviors it can predict...."

The best personality tests measure stable traits that don't change over time, compare one applicant's scores to others, produce the same results if the same person takes it again, and are valid predictors of job performance. A personality assessment should not show adverse impact; that is, scores should not differ for minority group members. Using assessments that may be economically, racially, educationally, or culturally biased or even insensitive is not a practice any organization should follow.

Diverse candidates are intelligent enough to know if an employer is just checking a diversity box. The best candidates will be attracted when they see an effort on the part of the organization and leaders to become more diverse and inclusive. **AQ**

Nancy Huckaba is a vice president of EFL Associates, one of the top 40 retainer-based executive search firms in America and an affiliate of CBIZ, Inc. She leads the nonprofit and for-purpose search practice in Kansas City.

Work Is the GREAT EQUALIZER

BY PAMELA GARBER

When each employee's skills, knowledge, and performance are the determining factors for advancement, equality is being practiced.

Workers on a project all have equal participation in the same structure, which is composed of the desired outcome and the required effort in various forms to reach this outcome. Each employee is a participant in this process and structure.

Employees will most likely have different ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. However, it is the personality and performance of individuals that is relevant to the level of cohesiveness and comfort among employees. Should a co-worker or a management executive exhibit prejudice or any demographic-based biased treatment, then that individual is failing to provide the organization with professionalism—and his or her performance is then failing. The clearly defined territory of professionalism will prove this person to be out of bounds. The unacceptable behavior has been identified. The next steps of how to address the problematic employee will follow the HR system in place.

THE EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT—AN AGREEMENT OF EMPLOYEE EQUALITY

A person and an organization partake in a contractual agreement. Employment begins with a contract between the employee and the employer. Merit and conduct are the ingredients that an employee brings to the job.

Merit is the earned knowledge, skills, and proficiency that make doing the job possible. It is the culmination of all the employee's training, schooling, degrees, certifications, and mentoring. Conduct consists of the employee's

workplace interactions, and can include talking, emailing, and on some occasions, breaking bread, making small talk, and celebrating birthdays. Conduct also includes the harder-to-pin-down factors of demeanor, energy, and presentation.

Work assignments, compensation, and treatment are the overall ingredients the organization gives to the employee. From the information presented thus far, the employment contract looks like a clear formula of quid pro quo.

ELIMINATE THE FAULTY PREMISE

The following faulty premise is shouted at us like a mandatory creed: For members of a minority race and members of a majority race to work together, on anything, at any time, there must be careful instructions from an elaborate, psychologically vetted formulaic program. The only equalizing force in this creed is that it equally insults all of us. Us.

Work proves that real progress in anything takes the efforts of all us. When we believe that the faulty premise is within the hearts and minds of our co-workers, then all involved have an unnecessary cross to bear. Hunting for evidence of prejudice in another's subtext is a burden that can be removed. Once removed, people enjoy the freedom of focusing on each other's actual words and deeds—the text and gestures taking place, without looking for possible hidden insults and slights.



WORK REVEALS PERSONALITY

During team projects, the unique personality style of each employee becomes apparent. How each person relates to the team is established, and his or her work temperament becomes easy to read. Co-worker knowledge, such as who likes to get started early, who works late, who feels a need to communicate, who prefers status updates by email, who likes coffee talk, who needs formal meetings, who thrives on challenges, who welcomes compliments, and who struggles with constructive criticism or feedback in general will become as clear as each person's name and face. Personality is its own variable, independent of background demographics. The glue holding each employee in good standing with the organization and with co-workers is a combination of work performance and overall presentation. How effectively assignments are executed and how warm and professional interactions with peers are remain key above everything else.

PERSONALITIES IN THE WORKPLACE: EMOTIONS VERSUS WORK

The standard professional demeanor is body language synced for the sole statement, "My attention is on the work at hand." Just as the state of mind of a fellow traveler in a shared elevator is obvious, whether we know him or not, the emotional well-being and mental state of mind of a co-worker is easily detected. How our co-workers feel often claims influence over the team's performance, communication, and results.

Sometimes co-workers' "professional" demeanors are just not professional. Here are some common demeanors that employees bring to the stage of the workplace:

Mr./Ms. Managing Up. These employees know how to position themselves in the best light possible at the best time possible to be seen by the best person(s) possible. Like a moth to a flame, this person always finds his key light. He walks in with the right folder, quote, or joke at the perfect time. She shines in the staff meeting or is seen in the throes of busyness throughout the day. But hidden from plain view is how the sizzle has no steak. All the busyness ultimately produces little more than fanfare and display. The epitome of style over substance, he smiles slightly at his desk as he claims credit for work he has only witnessed.

The Sincere Soldier. With the frequent stance of a careful waitstaff taking your order, this one aims to please. Nary a birthday is forgotten, and messages, in fact all communications, are delivered with kid gloves. Assignments are executed with thorough, efficient thought. Pluses of the Sincere Soldier are dependability, a well-meaning nature, and transparency in motives and agenda. This is a good egg. The drawbacks are that when there is any need for a person to vent to, or if they are asked to validate when someone's actions are toxic, or even just when the plain petty actions of others encroach on the team, the Sincere Soldier will not respond and instead adopts a stance like someone learning a new language, not comprehending the words uttered.

The Supportive Mentor. Like the Sincere Soldier, the Supportive Mentor is on the side of good. He wants each

“Regardless of whether the engagement of upper management and beyond becomes necessary, establishing and maintaining a clear path of productivity is crucial. ”



member of the team to succeed. He will draw from his own catalog of experiences. He will also do his best to access the assets of each person and provide encouragement, while pinpointing the negative traits in the most diplomatic and supportive manner. Think favorite high school coach or drama teacher, but with a genuine love of business.

The Fairy Godparent (FGP). This type can be male or female, but more commonly is female. The FGP offers nurturing at its most visible, ready with an ear, a tissue, and compassion, especially when others are watching. Soon it will be apparent to her chosen protégé that every conversation is supposed to be one in which the FGP is helping the designated weak disciple. By the time the protégé realizes the dynamic at play, the FGP’s teeth are already planted firmly into the flesh of the pattern. The best next steps are to minimize contact and be as concise as possible with word choice and disclosure. Conviction and security from the protégé will end the game. Eventually.

The Wounded One. This is the Whistle-Blower, Slip and Fall, and All-Around Victim. These people feel they are being persecuted; it’s just a matter of when they’ll let you know all the particulars. Firing such employees is out of the question, as they won’t leave without a fight. Any probation or plan of action after a poor performance evaluation must be well finessed and massaged lightly, but even then, any interactions with them that fall outside the realm of high praise are dicey at best. The best move is to be boring. Any display of emotions is like food for ants. Be dull and matter of fact and use as few words as possible. Be the empty kitchen cabinet.

The Bigot. This person can be overt or covert. Because projects and planning rely on team interaction and the exchange of ideas, when any team member makes choices from a belief in superiority and inferiority based on race, prejudice seeps through and poisons the execution of every project and development of every plan. Religion and gender are sometimes in the prejudice abuse arsenal, sitting alongside race, though race tends to be the gold standard.

Typically, bigots manage their own feelings of inferiority by bolstering themselves up through designating others as inferior. Weakness of self is redistributed toward their targets. This eventually escalates to finding fault with the designated inferior one’s work, similar to a mean teacher’s angry red markings all over the eager student’s essay.

In Catch-22 situations, it’s always best to get in front of the overall circumstances at hand. Even if the timing isn’t right to act, you’ll want to identify best options for the inevitable future decisions. Waiting to act is an action. Frame the whole mess as a challenge, the best puzzle to solve. Solving challenging puzzles has a set formula, which begins with documentation. And that’s certainly what you’ll want to do when dealing with a bigot. Document events and create a comprehensive report. To take the bitter edge off a little bit, think of your note-taking as pages for a mystery novel or pretend you are a doctor doing research on a subject—your co-worker.

In sum, there is a war—productivity verses sabotage. Bigotry is one form of work sabotage, though there are many others. Jealousy and resentment are emotions that accompany behaviors geared toward ruining a project or a fellow professional. There are situations where seeking aggressive legal and upper management involvement becomes mandatory.

Regardless of whether the engagement of upper management and beyond becomes necessary, establishing and maintaining a clear path of productivity is crucial. Picture bad weather during an outside event. The venue changes to indoors. Chairs are moved and dried off. Out come more towels for the attendees. The podium is repositioned. The bad weather is not denied. The changes have been implemented. And the focus of the original goal continues. **AQ**

Pamela Garber is a licensed mental health counselor who has been published in trade journals and is a speaker and workshop presenter at national conferences. She is a member of the American Psychological Association, an Associate of Crisis Care Network, and a licensed chemical addiction professional.

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What's Missing from Your Gender Equity Program?

MEN

BY DAVID G. SMITH AND W. BRAD JOHNSON



Gender equality in the workplace is largely seen as a women's issue.

Organizations and their male leaders see gender inequities as something women need to solve, and men are historically missing in efforts to address these problems. And because most men are not meaningfully engaged in addressing gender inequities, it may take another 202 years to bring about gender parity, according to 2018-19 World Economic Forum estimates.

Gender inequities are not women's issues—they are leadership issues. Framing gender inequities as "women's issues" gives men a free pass—"We're not women; it's not our problem." If gender equity is perceived to be a women's issue, men are more likely to believe they have no psychological standing or ownership to support taking action. The perception that men lack legitimacy because they aren't women, don't share women's experiences, or don't have the expertise keeps men silent.

Men need to do more to be a good guy in the workplace and pave the way for gender equality. The truth is that in most organizations—especially those that are traditionally male dominated—men are more likely to occupy key stakeholder positions. Men have the influence and power to create change, and they are crucial to altering the status quo. So why is that so many men don't see or understand women's experiences at work? The simple answer is that it's hard to see problems we don't encounter.

One of the primary roadblocks to male awareness of gender disparities relates to our misperceptions of women at work. For example, men often presume that women leave their companies at higher rates than men because they want to pause their careers to have children. In fact, McKinsey & Company's annual Women in the Workplace report in 2017 revealed that women are not leaving the workforce to have children—80% of the women planning to leave their company in the next two years were staying in the workforce. Instead, they're leaving a workplace that doesn't treat them fairly, hoping to find one that might. Like men, less than 2% of women say that they are leaving the workforce for reasons related to family.

Male misperception extends to how men and women perceive opportunity and equity in today's workplace. CNBC's 2018 "Closing the Gap" research on the finance industry indicated that male senior leaders generally believed that gender discrimination had significantly declined. In the survey, 56% of male participants believed that men and women were just as likely to become leaders in their industry, while only 37% of women said the same. Similarly,

75% of men indicated that men and women working at similar levels of management were paid equally, while only 40% of women agreed. Clearly, many men don't perceive gender inequities in the traditional workplace. It's hard to fix what you can't see.

Men have told us that they don't know how to get started in the fight for gender equity, and some encounter obstacles when they do. These obstacles include unclear rationales for inclusion, lack of support from senior leadership, and fear of making mistakes. Who wants to inadvertently offend someone or hurt their feelings when you have good intentions? It's easier to avoid taking action, so you don't engage. If you're not comfortable talking about gender, women's work experiences, harassment, discrimination, or emotions, then you'll probably avoid those conversations.

It's time to focus on fixing the systems within our workplace that reinforce and normalize the institutional sexism that creates gender inequities. The only way to drive significant long-term change is to fix our organizations' behavior and culture and to engage men in partnering with women to make this change.

MEN NEED TO BE ALLIES

How do we solve our problem? Men need to get involved. We need to learn to work together as gender partners and allies for each other. We define allyship as: "Actively promoting gender fairness and equity in the workplace through supportive and collaborative personal relationships and public acts of sponsorship and advocacy intended to drive systemic improvements to the workplace culture." Allies exhibit both affirmation and informed action.

We use the terms "partner" and "ally" because they conjure images of women and men as equals in the workplace, working together to achieve their mission. Allies in an alliance acknowledge the power of relationship and prize interdependence and responsibility to each other. Allies aren't saving women. They don't see an opportunity to take control of gender initiatives and rescue women from inequality, reinforcing the heroic, masculine stereotype and strengthening the status quo. Instead, allies emphasize humility and gender partnership—men and women working together in complementary roles—to create and support inclusive workplaces.

When you're getting started, allyship can feel complex, with competing expectations. Allyship demands that you simultaneously become attuned to women's experiences

“What makes you an ally to women also applies to being a better ally to someone of a different race, sexual orientation, military veteran status, or generation.”



and enter into conversations about gender equity. As an ally, you must learn when to speak up, listen, ask questions, and sometimes become invisible. Then you must go bigger. Involve men directly in gender equity work. Ask men to participate, volunteer, and contribute ideas, and give them a role in changing policy. Integrate gender diversity initiatives into operational business outcomes and then hold managers and leaders accountable. Make it clear that women are not the only beneficiaries of gender equity, and more men will act. That takes being a “good guy” to the next level.

One of the true paradoxes of male allyship is the consistent social psychological research evidence showing that when men advocate for women or call out gender inequities, they are perceived to be more credible because they are not acting in self-interest. The research shows that when men advocate for gender equity initiatives, their voice and message are given more weight because they are supporting initiatives that benefit women. Women are all too familiar with these double standards. It’s time for men to open their eyes to this opportunity and privilege and use it. As apparent outsiders to the cause, our voices on the topic of gender equity carry considerable weight.

MAKING PRIVILEGE COUNT

As it turns out, men can do so much more because of their innate privilege—even at the junior levels. Being members of the dominant gender at work, we are free to navigate the system through our knowledge of the culture and use our understanding of women’s experiences to disrupt the status quo. To develop our sense of being allies, we learn to see the world through others’ experiences. This requires being more aware, challenging assumptions, reading, learning, asking questions, and listening. Without this effort, we risk falling into the trap of silence—doing nothing. We can do better.

Fortunately, over the past several decades, more men have been willing to speak out publicly and act to level the playing

field for women. The research evidence is clear: When men are actively engaged in gender diversity, both women and men have a more positive outlook about their organization’s progress toward eliminating gender inequities. An international study done by Boston Consulting Group in 2017 asked women and men if they agreed that their company had made significant progress in the last three years in improving gender diversity at all levels of the company. These responses were correlated with whether they agreed that men in their company were involved in championing gender diversity. The results show that in companies where men are actively involved in gender diversity, 96% of people report progress, whereas where men are not engaged, only 30% see progress.

Allyship and support for gender equity must be public, too. It’s not enough that we hold ourselves individually accountable. We must be advocating for gender equity in public spaces, even when women aren’t in the room—especially when women aren’t in the room.

The skills you need to be a better ally for women at work will also make you a better ally for everyone. Think of them as gateway skills. What makes you an ally to women also applies to being a better ally to someone of a different race, sexual orientation, military veteran status, or generation. This will become clear as you learn how to develop these important skills for today’s workplace.

BEING AN ALLY IS WORK

Allyship is a continuous learning process. It’s a journey on which we will need to leverage and learn from each other, with men and women in partnership. Maintaining a learning orientation, a growth mindset, and a healthy dose of humility goes a long way toward being better allies. This is a marathon, not a sprint.

There are no perfect allies. As you work to become a better ally for the women around you, you will undoubtedly make a mistake. You’ll be stepping out of your comfort zone

“Start an ongoing discussion group to learn, practice, and share men’s stories and motivations for being better allies.”

and you’ll be putting yourself on display as a partner and supporter. As University of Houston research professor and *New York Times* bestselling author Brené Brown said, “You can choose courage or you can choose comfort. You cannot have both.” In many ways, allyship is a test of courage. If it were easy, we wouldn’t be talking about it. Allyship requires us to enter spaces and conversations that can make us feel uncomfortable and take the occasional misstep.

Many men have never been in a space where they were in the minority; they can find this both uncomfortable and powerful. (Take it from two guys who routinely speak and work in female-dominated spaces.) Most people don’t want to unintentionally offend someone or hurt their feelings. And others worry that they’ll experience resistance, backlash, or the dreaded wimp penalty. They fear they’ll be stigmatized through association with women’s initiatives at work. When faced with these uncertainties and fears, they naturally want to step back, rather than push forward.

But men need to get comfortable with these situations and conversations. Allies must immerse themselves in spaces where they can use their curiosity and learning orientation to ask questions and just listen. They must change the prevailing discourse from a wimp penalty. Instead, recognize that it actually takes a stronger, more secure man to support women’s initiatives. This requires showing up in spaces where you don’t think to venture and in ways you are unaccustomed to and speaking up when you see backlash behavior. And in the process, make mistakes, learn from them, and figure out ways to improve.

In our experience, we find that when we make a mistake, we benefit from the honest relationships we’ve developed with women who trust our good intentions. Speaking out isn’t easy, and no one expects perfection. But becoming a partner and ally to women is a crucial element of helping them reach equity in the workplace. If you think you’re doing enough, you’re probably not. Push further.

7 WAYS TO BE AN ALLY

Not sure where to start? Make your next diversity and inclusion event focused on men as allies. Better yet, start an ongoing discussion group to learn, practice, and share men’s stories and motivations for being better allies. Help them to develop an awareness of women’s different experiences at work, recognize their own privilege, and think about how they show up as allies in workplace relationships with women—what we call gender intelligence (GQ).

Our book, *Good Guys: How Men Can Be Better Allies for Women in the Workplace*, is based on extensive research with women

across industries about their experiences with male allies, focusing on the tangible ally behaviors they found most important. We also interviewed many of the male allies these women nominated. The result is a book chock full of evidence-based actionable strategies for men who aspire to real gender allyship. We’ll leave you with seven of them to get you started on your ally journey:

Sharpen your situational awareness. Be vigilant in observing how your female colleagues are experiencing meetings and other gatherings and be alert to inequities and disparities in these contexts.

Cure your gynophobia. Publicly push back on false narratives about the “risks” of engaging with women at work while deliberately and transparently initiating conversations, friendships, and mentorships with female colleagues.

Ask about women’s experiences. With humility and genuine curiosity, strengthen your GQ by learning about the uniquely gendered workplace experiences of some of the women you work with.

Recognize that all women are not the same. Be attuned to the unique experiences and intersectional identities (such as race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, generation, religion) of the women you work with.

Own and strategically deploy your privilege. Recognize and fully own your privilege as a man—your opportunities, advantages, resources, and power—while leveraging it for the benefit of women and other marginalized groups.

Deliberately seek feedback from women. Establish trust with a network of women who will give you unvarnished feedback about how your workplace attitudes and behaviors land with women and receive this feedback as a gift.

Notice sexist words and phrases—and intervene. Watch and listen for noninclusive language, sexist comments, overt misogyny, and harassing behavior; then, say something to disrupt it. [AQ](#)

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EMPOWERING COMMUNITY AT WORK THROUGH D&I

BY REBECCA CENNI-LEVENTHAL

Transforming a corporate persona into a community depends on impartial, diverse recruitment initiatives and an inclusive brand experience.

A sense of belonging at work exists when employees are empowered to bring their best selves to work each day. Diversity and inclusion (D&I), respectively, are essential to assuring a positive experience at work. That's what we want to safeguard. When employees are happily engaged in their job functions, they are motivated by a feeling of purpose.

As a female entrepreneur turned business owner, I feel very connected to D&I initiatives. Opportunity often hinges on an open door. I understand the value of having help in opening that proverbial door from my own personal experience. Even when you have all the confidence, experience, and skills needed to meet or exceed expectations, without the chance to use your talents, potential remains just that. That's what diversity and inclusion are about—making sure there are no jammed doors inside your business.

To influence positive change within your hiring efforts, talk early and often about diversity. Here are some ways to make it part of your organization's mission and value system:

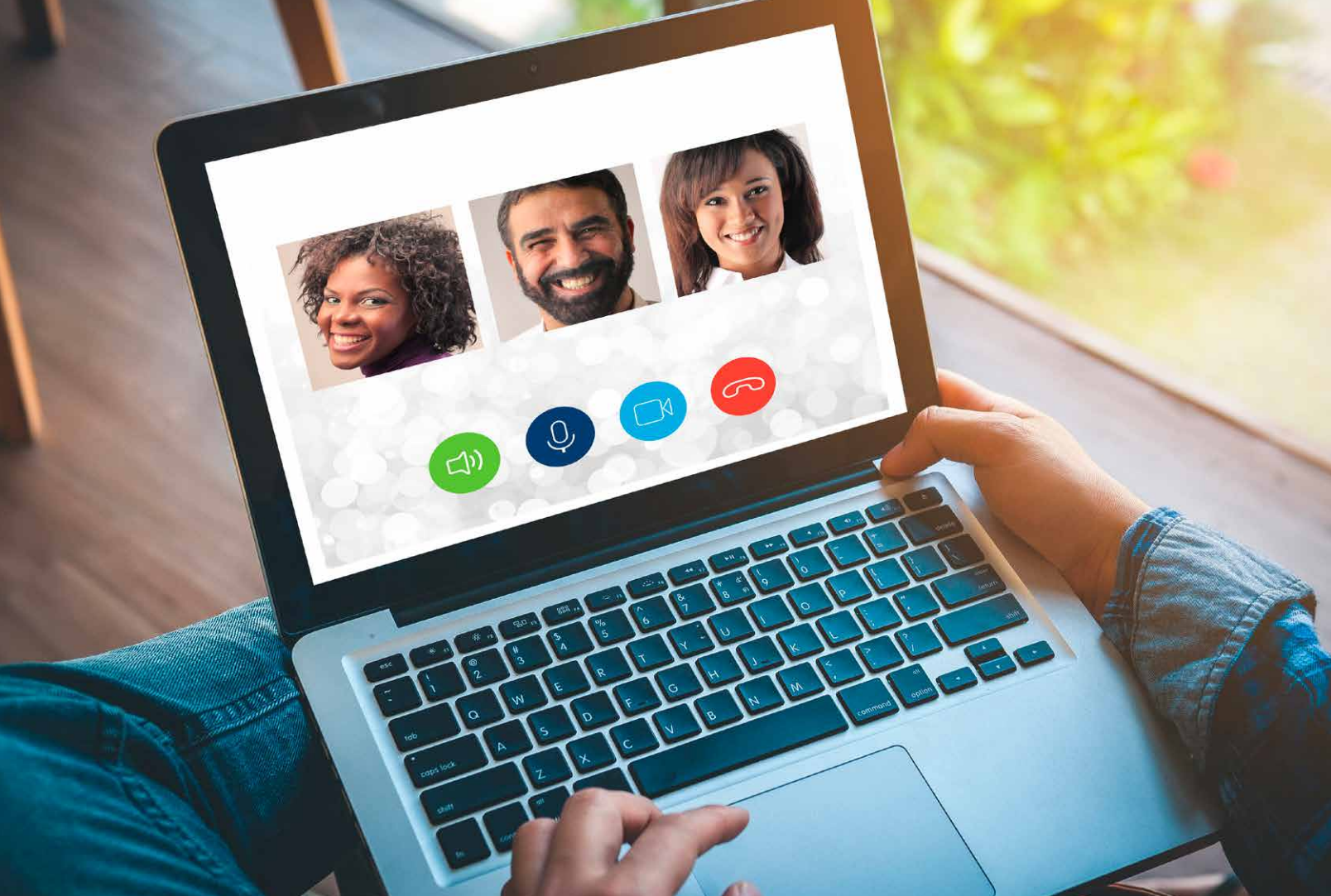
Talk about diversity within your organization. This is my greatest takeaway from all the research and thought-provoking content I've been absorbing. By doing this frequently and early on with executive teams and recruiters, leaders can further the importance of these values and the

urgency of related initiatives within their organizations. New ideas and perspectives are vital to ingenuity. For business to continue innovating, we have to address shortcomings and share best practices for overcoming them. It's how we can continually learn and grow as businesses—and as human beings.

Attract talent based on the social and corporate commitments your company advertises. A message that conveys corporate values and reaches a broad audience can help build a diverse community at work. Consider making diversity and inclusion integral in your brand mission. This assures that diversity is a constant conversation at work, and that the people who embody corporate culture are wholly represented by the brand.

Take a look at your industry and your workforce. What is unique? What could make it fuller? The answers are different for every market, service, product, geography, and/or circumstance. Reflecting on the current landscape can help you plant seeds to assure a flourishing tomorrow.

To understand your workforce landscape, identify what works well and where you can impact positive change. Diversity isn't just about gender or race. Age, education, geography, family status, religion, sexual orientation, and countless other factors are equally as important when



it comes to diversity. The overarching message is about diversity of thought.

So capture the data within your organization. Voluntary, self-identifying surveys can help collect information, but it's important to understand the blind spots. Certain aspects of diversity, such as religion and sexual orientation, are rather personal, and sharing these details directly with a manager may make an employee feel uncomfortable and deter him or her from self-identifying. Employers may want to use a third party or survey technology to capture information that will be reported. This way, privacy is assured, and all data can be aggregated neutrally without identifying information.

Review the information in detail to discover areas for improvement. Studying hiring success can better acquaint you with hiring pitfalls. For example, at Atrium, we are a Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC)-certified business, and as such, our organization champions female empowerment. As a result, our company has no shortage of female talent or women executives helping to build our vision. It's valuable to consistently evaluate

and reevaluate hiring procedures to optimize change management outcomes.

To expand your sourcing efforts, take a structured approach that assures decisions are informed by neutral resources. If you're not sure how to go about making initial changes, begin with assessing your hiring procedures. A more controlled approach to hiring can help overcome implicit bias. Decisions based on data offer a straightforward, measurable approach to reaching new talent goals. When it comes to building a diverse team, keep a hiring emphasis on groups that are underrepresented in your organization or geography. Focusing on how you can develop their career and leadership potential can further support talent retention of minority employees.

Be mindful about how your brand can strengthen relationships with underrepresented communities to connect with a greater candidate audience. Building relationships with universities, nonprofit organizations, and other talent communities can help ensure your workforce resembles the dynamic environment you wish to engage. When a company has an individual or a small team review

“By adopting a more comprehensive talent cycle as part of your hiring process, employers can realize potential at all levels to reinforce a diverse, able talent community.”



resumes, it limits perspective. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to lessen the chance for unconscious bias. Circulating resumes to people outside of a specific business unit, division, or even industry can result in a wider lens to capture a more diverse candidate base. You can also consider partnering with a talent firm that has an established diverse candidate base to expand sourcing efforts.

Beyond diverse candidate pools, diverse recruitment strategies are necessary to reduce the potential for predisposition. By adopting a more comprehensive talent cycle as part of your hiring process, employers can realize potential at all levels to reinforce a diverse, able talent community. Talent technology can help ensure an all-inclusive candidate pipeline by refining your various talent communities, including early talent, contracted talent, new talent, talent returning to the workforce after leave, and any other potential your organization is pursuing. Continually engaging and/or reengaging talent ensures recruiting efforts are reaching all qualified talent for relevant open roles. These enhancements can reduce the potential for lost connections or lapsed communications to broaden your talent network and improve the overall candidate experience within your community.

To build inclusive environments, empower acceptance to reinforce community and a sense of belonging at work.

We must go beyond the numbers to truly empower a sense of belonging. Brands with recruitment marketing strategies that engage workers at all levels and within various capacities—from early talent relationships established through internship opportunities to mid- or senior-level executives returning to the workforce—can develop an inclusive work environment that encourages employees to genuinely engage in their work and company culture.

When making a hiring decision, consider searching for talent that not only has the skills that fit well with your business needs but also can be a culture add that brings an aspect of diversity to your organization. With simultaneous human resources priorities and the administration that comes along with them, many companies are revolutionizing recruitment with talent technology, business intelligent software, and engagement solutions to help ensure the success of their workforce.

Communication tools can also be used to personalize the employee experience and empower a greater sense of community at work. Recently, our employee experience and diversity and inclusion managers conducted a voluntary poll of employees to learn which holidays they would like to see incorporated into the corporate calendar. The initiative grew engagement and cultural insight within our work community. By offering a platform by which all voices could be heard, we learned a lot about the cultures, ideals, and personal beliefs within our organization. Respecting these beliefs is important for relationship building, and knowing colleagues are invested in learning about them is meaningful. It can also be fulfilling for employees who may not have otherwise had the occasion to learn about a particular custom or tradition.

To realize the full potential of your workforce, encourage employees to bring their personal motivators to work. As we move between remote work and post COVID-19 office experiences, flexibility at work is something we are probably considering now more than ever. It's true, at least in my opinion, that there is no real balance between work-life and life-life. Mental and physical well-being are shown to improve when employees feel comfortable as their authentic selves, rather than a perceived corporate persona or stereotype. By accepting work as part of life rather than the other way around, companies can be inherently more inclusive. Leading with compassion and making considerations with regard to

flexible scheduling or remote opportunities can go a long way in reaching and retaining diverse talent, motivating employees, and reducing on-the-job stress. A healthy work environment assures the success and well-being of an all-inclusive workforce.

Recognizing the individual motivators that bring our employees to work each day is key to empowering acceptance at work. Regardless of what drives us, we have personal needs that are motivated by individual value sets. Research from the Society for Human Resource Management demonstrates that flexibility does not reduce productivity. Contrary to management concerns, leaders who work with employees to accommodate care duties, doctor appointments, and other personal obligations see increased productivity and engagement. Vital needs, personal or business, don't pause to accommodate our schedules, and by being able to take care of ourselves, we are able to better care for our business. If you'd like to grow greater opportunity for more people and build a more inclusive work environment, consider establishing more autonomy within your organization when possible.

To fully embrace all voices within the workforce, make employee influence a part of the company's strategic vision. Corporate culture is composed of many moving parts, so consistent communication about business updates and initiatives at the executive level and staff level creates an environment where employees feel they can safely contribute to the dialogue. You can enable participation at all levels by offering a communication platform by which all voices can be heard on a voluntary and anonymous basis, whether through employee surveys, experiential managers, HR leaders, or a third party. Incorporating staff feedback into team events, snack cabinets, and the corporate calendar of events helps individuals feel valued. To spark more diverse conversations, encourage employees to offer feedback for key business decisions. Topics such as corporate trainings, policies, and procedures—especially regarding diversity and inclusion—benefit from genuine employee feedback.

Celebrating company values frequently and consistently ensures they remain top of mind within the hiring process and conveys their importance within your corporate community. For more effective change management, many companies broaden their core value set to embrace new business initiatives like D&I. Learning and development investments—from the top down—ensure a full understanding of company values and how they relate to business best practices. To fully empower inclusivity, the most senior level leadership support is necessary. From executive management to entry-level management and staff at large, everyone in your company must understand the business case for D&I and its influence on your strategic goals. Identify a champion within your organization. Visible support of D&I encourages greater adoption of new policies and holds the business accountable for measuring its impact.

“Encourage employees to offer feedback for key business decisions. Topics such as corporate trainings, policies, and procedures—especially regarding diversity and inclusion—benefit from genuine employee feedback.”

To empower community at work through diverse hiring and inclusive environments, remain accountable. Once you know the outcomes of employee surveys and people analytics, own the information. Continue sharing progress with your staff and announce milestones, recognitions, or other achievements to the public, as those improvements are sure to attract potential candidates. If the results are not meeting your objectives, communicate that with executive management and employees. Outcomes and bottlenecks are central to a thorough evaluation, and staff at all levels should be included in the feedback loop. Continue asking for input. Was training effective? Why or why not?

Review success and shortcomings and recalibrate where needed. Keep the conversation going. D&I initiatives are not static, so they will need constant evaluation and reassessment to keep them moving forward. Use metrics, and share successes and deficiencies. Encourage patience, persistence, and continued transparency to assure confidence in the changed processes, tools, and techniques. If the strategic plan you've developed is simply not working for your business, try going back to the beginning. Collect new data, pivot your strategy, and start over with a fresh perspective.

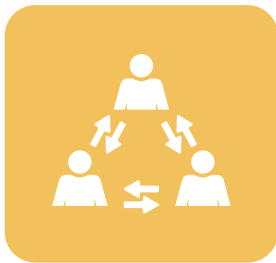
While inclusiveness is the right thing to do, it can also make the work we are doing more valuable because it cultivates a greater sense of belonging. To safeguard all-inclusive ideals and a value-based mission, your HR leader or partner should represent the people who embody your brand culture. Make sure this leader is a stakeholder in critical business decisions so that diversity, inclusion, and value-based decisions are what inform nearly every aspect of your business. [AQ](#)

Rebecca Cenni-Leventhal is founder and CEO of Atrium, an all-inclusive partner for talent and contingent solutions established in 1995. Atrium is recognized as a champion of supplier diversity, topping the lists of Inc. 5000 and Diversity Business as a leader of Women, Diversity and Privately Held organizations and recognized by the Women Presidents' Organization as a "50 Fastest-Growing Women-Owned/Led Companies in North America."

THE CRITICAL SKILL

Needed to Make Diversity Work

BY SHANNON HUFFMAN POLSON



COMMUNICATION



COLLABORATION



LISTENING



EMPATHY

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic,
the pace of change presented challenges.

Over years of working with companies across industries and sectors on leadership and grit, I have seen that change—whether it came from an acquisition, a merger, technology, or a reorganization—has always been challenging. Growth and contraction are equally difficult. With the confluence of COVID-19 and its associated economic implications, as well as social unrest, every industry is facing unprecedented change—some acceleration, others attrition, and for everyone, shifts or redirection. The Grit Institute and my book, *The Grit Factor*, recognize that change, especially cataclysmic change, is constant and requires grit.

Given these challenges, your company needs all hands on deck with the opportunity to contribute their full potential.

You need teams that are thoughtful and creative. If there was one critical consideration about building a team that emerged from my interviews with senior military leaders for *The Grit Factor*, it was this: The most successful teams are diverse teams. But diversity alone is not enough. Leaders must know how to employ diverse teams effectively.

The importance of diversity in teams was recognized by John Stuart Mill in the 19th century, when he wrote: “It is hardly possible to overrate the value of placing human beings in contact with persons dissimilar to themselves, and with modes of thought and action unlike those with which they are familiar. Such communication has always been, and

is peculiarly in the present age, one of the primary sources of progress.”

In my interview for *The Grit Factor* with General Ann Dunwoody, the first woman to earn four stars in the Army, she put it plainly: “If you’re sitting around the table with people who all look like you, and sound like you, you’re going to have a narrow view of things.”

Building a diverse team takes work and focused application. You know that your organization will be more innovative and creative—critical traits in a time of change—with more diverse representation. This doesn’t apply only with respect to gender and race, though those are excellent starting places, but also to age, personality, and background.

LISTEN UP

Much has been written on how to go about the important work of building diverse teams. But less is discussed about how to make that team, once assembled, function optimally. Perhaps the most important and most strategic skill is the one that is least discussed. It isn’t enough to have your team assembled at the table—the hard work is ensuring that those voices are heard and considered. The hardest work is putting a premium on listening first.

The importance of listening for leaders not only came up in nearly every interview I conducted with general officers, but it is supported by numerous outside studies as well. Whether it is listening up (to your boss, board, or member of your C-suite) so that you understand and can meet requirements, or listening laterally and down (to your colleagues, direct reports, and support staff) to understand the environment and how best to take care of your people, being a strong leader requires listening until it hurts. Of course, by itself, listening does not solve anything. Listening, and the information that comes from it, informs action—and supports the efforts you put into developing a diverse team. Without listening, you are setting yourself up for failure and perhaps embarrassment, and you will not be able to capitalize on the significant benefits that come from diversity.

So why is listening hard? In a time of crisis, leaders feel the weight of vision setting, as they should. Most leaders are also afraid, both for personal reasons and concerning the future of their organizations. Fear and a bias for action are a part of many, if not most, leaders, and both interfere with good listening. To listen first, a leader has to consciously put aside both action and fear. A leader has to ask questions and make space for the answers. This active listening is both art and science.

LISTENING A PART OF GRIT

What does listening have to do with grit? A lot, it turns out. So much, in fact, that listening is a part of the U.S. Army Master Resilience training. For leaders navigating challenging environments, actively listening helps you understand the

environment and provides critical clues about how to proceed. Whether you need to learn what is expected of you or understand how you can best take care of and develop your people, listening is a key component in giving you the information needed to make it through even the most difficult times. It gives you a tool you can use again and again, helping you to begin effectively, stay on track, and course-correct after a misstep.

Knowing how to listen will help you gather vital information and establish a trusting relationship with both co-workers and superiors, especially as the corporate world continues to shift away from top-down directive leadership. Today, leaders are expected to develop and employ the strengths of each team member, so it is more important than ever to truly understand the people who are working for you—especially with a diverse team, where perspectives and ideas may prove challenging to more established leadership. Gaining that understanding requires listening. The Army’s maxim “mission first, people always” reflects the reasoning behind this work. In addition to stressing the right priorities, it is also the way the work gets done: You take care of your people, and they take care of the mission. That’s not to say that there isn’t tough love along the way—there always is. But it’s very hard to support people personally and professionally if you don’t know them, and hard to know them if you don’t listen.

Listening is a vital component of something every leader needs: understanding. I grew up with a calligraphic rendering of the “Peace Prayer” of Saint Francis on the wall outside our kitchen. One line of the prayer reads, “Lord, grant that I may not so much seek to be understood as to understand.” Saint Francis knew that listening is an essential precursor to understanding. It means you care enough about others that you’re willing to suspend your own desire to jump to judgment and consider that there may be other important perspectives. It does not necessarily mean that what you hear should inform direction or decision. The act of listening itself is important in the process of determining the best way to go forward, and it is a requirement of leveraging the maximum impact of your diverse team.

Looking toward the months and even years ahead, much is uncertain. Long-term goals are impossible given what is unknown. Still, your organization has to be prepared for whatever comes, and this requires creativity and adaptability. The best starting point is diversity. Then, to give your diverse team every chance to bring their unique skills to any given solution, you and your leadership team must prioritize listening first. [AQ](#)

Shannon Huffman Polson is founder and CEO of The Grit Institute, a leadership development organization dedicated to ethical, people-centered leadership. She is one of the first women to fly the Apache helicopter in the U.S. Army, and a veteran of the corporate world as well. She is the author of The Grit Factor: Courage, Resilience, and Leadership in the Most Male-Dominated Organization in the World (Harvard Business Review Press, 2020).

STANDING OUT AND FITTING IN A Blueprint for DEI

BY TIM MILAM (WITH ASSISTANCE BY SHANNON RODRIGUEZ)



In 1988, I began my first real job at an architecture firm. If you didn't live through the late '80s, trust me when I tell you that the economy was not in good shape.

Since there were no open positions in the area where I was living, I relocated to a smallish town in a very rural state. I accepted a job at a 30-person architecture firm.

As a recent graduate, I knew next to nothing about the "real" world of architecture, but I was determined to do my best and worked hard. One day, I was called into the director's office. I assumed this was not a good thing. The director, an imposing man in a suit, was very polite but told me that in order to "fit in," I needed to cut my hair and dress more conservatively. When I asked if this was about my performance, he said I was doing well but that someone outside the firm had called to complain about my appearance. The problem was that I just didn't look like the other employees. He explained that as former military, he would always believe that men should have short hair and dress conservatively.

The director never said that I looked "gay," but I assumed this was the subtext. I really needed the job, but after a lot of introspection, I decided not to comply but to work harder and improve my skills. After a few more months, I requested a transfer to another branch of the company in a more progressive city. While I would like to say that everything got better in the new office, that was not the case, as I still felt like I was an outsider.

I'm not telling this story to complain. I know that, as a white man, I had the option to conform and "pass" while others are labeled and judged whenever they leave their homes. This experience and others, however, made me understand what it feels like to be on the outside looking in. I could have pretended to be someone I'm not, but it seemed wrong to work in an atmosphere where I felt excluded and would never be fully embraced as a team member. I promised myself that I would find a workplace that welcomed me, valued my uniqueness, and understood that I could be an asset. I wanted to find a place where I could stand out *and* fit in.

I am pleased to report that I eventually found an office where I belonged. These days, a large portion of my life is dedicated to issues surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). I am a partner at FXCollaborative (FXC) located in New York City, and our firm is committed to making improvements—not only in our business but in the architecture profession. Additionally, I am a founding director of Build Out Alliance, a not-for-profit dedicated to promoting and advocating for the LGBTQ+ community in the building design and construction industries.

DEFINING DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND EQUITY

What exactly does DEI encompass? Here is my elevator pitch:

- Diversity requires that the makeup of our staff reflect the world in which we live with a mix of genders, races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, etc.
- Inclusion must happen to ensure that all of these (very individual) employees being hired are working in an environment where they can feel comfortable and in which they feel that they belong.
- Equity means that all employees are treated fairly and given equal opportunities for training, professional development, project assignments, and leadership roles.

These three DEI components overlap and must constantly be assessed, adjusted, and redefined. To be truly successful, a business must put effort into all three and recognize that this is more than just checking a few boxes.

So, where do we begin? I believe that the starting point is taking an honest look at your business practices and, after you've acknowledged your reality, committing to positive change and to doing the necessary hard work.

Like many professions, architecture has historically been a male-dominated field, and in the United States, it has been mostly white. Our firm is no exception. Although difficult, the first step for us was to face some cold, hard facts. In 2014, the partners in our firm began evaluating who our "future leaders" would be. When we assessed the final categories, we realized that there was a serious lack of diversity. While we talked about diversity and considered ourselves progressive, we acknowledged that we needed to do much more.

Around the same time, a group of junior-level women had come forward and were interested in starting an official women's group to address gender-related issues in the firm and the profession. The organizers asked to see the firm's diversity data, which became the first time that we shared this beyond the leadership group. This transparency, and the acknowledgment of the challenges we faced, became a turning point in the firm, and our first employee resource group (ERG) was formed. The mission of the group, known as FXWomen, is to support the professional growth and leadership development for women in our office and profession through training initiatives, mentoring, and

“One of the major takeaways from the implicit bias training was that we needed to recruit differently. We have made significant strides to increase our recruiting efforts and improve the pipeline through various outreach initiatives.”



outreach. The firm provides financial support to the group and the use of our office space for events, seminars, and lectures.

Discussions between leadership and FXWomen, which had become quite honest and often uncomfortable, helped us recognize that training was a critical element of the puzzle that had been missing within our firm. Our focus shifted beyond the baseline of tolerance to deliberate, conscious actions toward diversity, equity, and inclusion and set us on a path to be more proactive.

TRAINING FOR DEI

In our firm, we approach DEI training from several different angles, including formal and informal sessions, open discussions, and interactive panels.

In New York, yearly anti-sexual harassment training is now required for a firm our size. The most effective training to date was conducted in-person by an expert facilitator, with attendance required for all staff. Topics covered in the training included types of harassment, the legal risk and liability involved for all, one's responsibility as a bystander, and reporting requirements. Managers received additional training on how to handle any potential harassment complaints.

One of our most successful training sessions has been on the subject of unconscious/implicit bias. These sessions can be tough and uncomfortable as personal issues emerge and employees realize that the biases have impact. Everyone walks away with more awareness and sensitivity, which slowly starts to become part of the firm culture. Additionally, as we learn more about our colleagues, it's much easier to understand how conditions and experiences shape someone and to be more empathetic and take time to explain and inform.

The training also put a spotlight on firmwide biases that played a major role in how we operated. Some of those biases included what schools we recruited from, how gender played a role in the way we staffed our projects, how our promotion process worked, and how certain language is often used to describe someone who is/looks "different." Led by an expert with industry experience, the training was required for all staff—including all leadership. The success of the training, which will be required on an ongoing basis, has allowed us to become more aware of our biases and work together to correct them.

One of the major takeaways from the implicit bias training was that we needed to recruit differently. In the past few years, we have made significant strides to increase our recruiting efforts and improve the pipeline through various outreach initiatives. For diversity with entry-level employees, the key is to have relationships with various schools to create a pipeline of candidates, including connecting with schools that have a large percentage of minority students such as HBCUs (historically black colleges and universities).

Some of our regular efforts include attending career fairs, providing paid internships throughout the year, offering housing stipends for all students that do not live in the New York City area, and supporting employees who wish to teach design courses at local colleges. We also offer resume and portfolio reviews twice a year to students who suffer from a lack of exposure to the profession or have little to no resources available at their respective colleges to assist them in this manner. We also recognize that for this profession to become more diverse, we need to target students at the high school and elementary school levels and introduce them to architecture, which we have partnered with local organizations to do.



NO SIMPLE SOLUTIONS

Unfortunately, not everyone understands the challenge of diversity faced in our office. Recently a friend said to me, “Oh, just hire more Black architects.” If only it were that easy. Of all the registered architects in the United States, only 2% are Black. That’s only 2,300 Black architects in the entire nation, so how does our firm attract some of those architects?

The other obstacle for diversity is the classic argument: “We don’t consider race—we hire the best people.” Of course, we want the best and brightest employees, but someone has to determine who makes the cut. First of all, if we don’t have a diverse candidate pool, it’s impossible to have a diverse staff, so all recruiting strategies must be considered.

It’s not enough to find the candidates. You must also consider who is making the hiring decisions. If there is a lack of diversity in this group, that is problematic. We all have biases—both conscious and unconscious—that can impact who is hired. Sometimes these biases are not apparent, but upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that certain schools are preferred (by alumni) or that slick design portfolios are valued. While some programs offer semester-long classes in portfolio development, other programs never mention portfolios. Some students must work part-time or full-time jobs while studying, so they don’t have the same opportunities to develop work that is portfolio-ready—or their schools don’t have the technology, expertise, or mentors to assist them.

The types of training previously discussed in this article are helpful in that they bring attention to and awareness of DEI. It can be leveraged to wake up employees and encourage them to start thinking about these important issues. These sessions have been magnified by the social equality

movements that have happened during the last few years: Me Too, Time’s Up, and Black Lives Matter. For architects, there was even an underground “whisper” list in 2018 called “Shitty Architecture Men,” and there’s currently a shared chart on social media that tracks diversity in various firms in New York City to illustrate the problems.

Our DEI initiatives have stretched beyond training, discussions, and panels to the creation of meaningful policy changes in our firm. We are committed to creating and supporting an environment where every employee feels safe and welcomed to express their gender identity. In support of our LGBTQ+ employees, we have introduced a “preferred pronouns” policy, allowing employees to use the pronoun they most closely identify with. We have also introduced guidelines for anyone going through a gender transition.

These are just a few examples of DEI initiatives, and there are many more components. The subject is complex and includes sensitive, uncomfortable topics. Business owners and managers may think that DEI is a noble cause but is too much work and a distraction from the essential tasks necessary to survive, especially in the current environment. The answer is that for employees to be at their best, we must create an inclusive and supportive environment. If employees don’t have to put energy into worrying, adapting, or hiding, they will contribute more and improve your bottom line. In addition to it being the right thing to do, it is a solid business practice. ^{AQ}

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