
Creating Diverse and Inclusive Work Cultures: 10 ways Leaders can Support Diversity and Inclusion

By: Robin Pedrelli

The work of diversity and inclusion has evolved considerably even in the last ten years. Over a decade ago, the conversations focused more on recruitment and retention and we explored diversity more from a programs and initiatives perspective. Today diversity and inclusion has become much more aligned with overall business strategy and contributes to both top and bottom line results. In addition to the well-proven impact on recruitment and retention efforts, many organizations are leveraging diversity to enhance community outreach and PR efforts, reach niche markets, inform consumer intelligence efforts and drive product and service innovations.

We hear, talk and read a lot about how organizations can support effective D&I work and drive D&I strategies that are sustainable and connected to the business. Diversity is no longer viewed as just a minority concern and is no longer considered the sole responsibility of the D&I practitioner. Diversity and inclusion is a systemic business imperative that requires leadership capability across the organization.

This article offers some concrete tips that are designed to engage leaders and managers in diversity and inclusion work and serve as a resource to better enable their success.

How Leaders and Managers Can Support Diversity and Inclusion

1. Understand the company-specific definition for diversity and diversity management. It is important to know and be able to clearly articulate the diversity goals of the company and how those goals will impact the goals of the organization and your specific department or business unit. It can be helpful to develop a high-level diversity speech that, in five minutes

or less, delivers a compelling diversity pitch. Always be mindful of opportunities to put the speech into play.

2. Be aware of the demographic makeup of your team and the resulting diversity challenges, opportunities, and advantages. Recognize what each employee brings to the table and how to leverage the unique perspectives, ideas, and customer knowledge in your team. You may be surprised to discover just how many diversity elements are present in your work team.
3. Keep diversity at the forefront when hiring for an existing or new position. Work with your HR department in a combined effort to source and build a diverse candidate pipeline. Support and advocate for company-wide initiatives that enhance your access to diverse talent. Be patient because it can take additional time and effort to attract this kind of diversity into the candidate pool, but the resulting benefits far outweigh the short-term costs and challenges.
4. Become a culturally competent leader. Take the time to learn about different cultural and religious practices and policies. Consider important holidays when planning work assignments and responding to requests for time off. Take advantage of diversity training offered by the company and through external resources. Regularly visit diversity web sites like the inclusionlearningloop.com, diversity-executive.com, and diversityinc.com, as well as sites that speak to specific diverse groups. You will find a list of [diveristy resources and portal sites](#) on the Inclusion Learning Loop™. Take an interest in each employee personally. Ask everyone to share a bit, and feel free to respectfully ask questions.
5. Set clear expectations for all your employees. Be sure that everyone in your direct report understands the importance placed on diversity. Demand respectful, supportive behavior as the only acceptable standard of interaction between you and your team and among members of your team. Hold everyone accountable to the diversity goals and the diversity vision.
6. Seek out partners and allies within the organization. Marketing departments and community affairs departments can be a great source of information and may also have substantial budgets dedicated to diversity efforts. Human resource and/or diversity departments can help you increase the diversity in your group and improve your diversity management

competencies. Leverage these relationships to pool resources, build a solid business case, and share ideas for taking diversity work to the next level.

7. Create a positive, supportive environment. Demonstrate your commitment with your actions as well as your words. Offer to sit on the organization's diversity council or volunteer to chair a specific affinity group. Make sure that women and under-represented employee groups have equal access to high profile, challenging assignments and mentors. Provide honest feedback in a way that sustains the growth and development of all employees. Foster a committed team by empowering employees to participate in key decisions and offer feedback.
8. Understand the difference between issues that are diversity-related versus performance-related. Clearly communicate the expectations and job requirements of each role within your team and expect no more or no less from any employee.
9. Commit to continuous improvement and manage your diversity goals. The outcomes resulting from your work can provide excellent opportunity to leverage what works and grow in areas where there is room for improvement.
10. Provide your employees with a continual flow of information relating to your diversity goals and progress. Make it known how the diversity on your team contributes to the success of the business unit and company overall. Celebrate the wins and strive for improvement.

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