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SEVEN WAYS LEADERS CAN BE MORE INCLUSIVE TODAY

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If you are looking to show your team that they are valued today, the work must start now.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion don't just happen in a company overnight. There are steps your company can take immediately, however, to **promote a more inclusive environment for employees.**

Too often, **companies lose great employees** while they develop large organizational plans. Strategic plans are great and getting buy-in from the top is necessary for lasting change. However, if you're looking to show the individuals you currently have that they are valued now, using a **"working our way to the middle"** approach is your best option. **The work must start now.** Here are seven ways you can start building a more inclusive workplace today.

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01 Self-awareness: Identify Your Own Bias

Before you begin the work to be inclusive of all identities in your workplace, it is important that you understand your own bias. We all have them. You can start small by taking a few of [Harvard's Implicit Association Tests \(IATs\)](#). Start with three areas you feel bias may exist, whether this is based on your own personal revelation or feedback others have shared with you. Biases are feelings, and feelings, no matter how covert, affect our decisions and actions. Being self-aware is the first step to intentionally removing bias from decision making. Be transparent and model your intentional decision making by sharing your biases with your employees and challenge them to identify and share some biases they may have.

Ask Yourself:

- Do I understand my bias in favor of my own identity (race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc)?
- Do I intentionally remove bias from decision making?

02 Create Safe and Open Environments

It is important that leaders, their coworkers, and employees feel that they can share their experiences, concerns, needs, and expectations without fear of retaliation. How a leader reacts the first time someone confides in them sets the tone for the environment. If a safe and open environment does not yet exist and you want to know what challenges employees are facing, just ask. Surveys are great on a large scale, but on a smaller scale, have one-on-one conversations. Your employees should feel safe and comfortable and know you care.

Ask Yourself:

- Do I regularly provide a space (time and place) for conversations about feelings and experiences in the workplace?
- Do I support and uplift voices of those who are marginalized?
- Do I set expectations and procedures that support a safe and open work environment?

03

Initiate Hard Conversations

As a leader, the conversations you have with your team set the tone for conversations throughout the workplace. By initiating hard conversations with your team, both individually and in groups, you set an expectation for what is allowed and acceptable. While those conversations may initially feel uncomfortable, they are necessary. Those few tense moments will move you towards the inclusive environment you are looking to create. The benefits also include happier employees with strong work relationships and increased productivity.

Ask Yourself:

- Do I censor myself or others to avoid topics that make me uncomfortable?
- Do I know anyone who is great at having hard conversations I could learn from?

04

Engage in Sponsorship Instead of Mentorship

Foster relationships of advocacy over those of feedback and advice. Rather than encouraging an employee in a career path, help to drive a career vision. Use your influence to create areas of visibility for your employees. Be willing to go to bat for the employees you are sponsoring. Focus on employee development and growth and support upward mobility. Seek professional development opportunities for your employees that build on their strengths, improve areas of weakness and align to their interests.

Ask Yourself:

- Do I know the strengths and interests of my employees?
- Do I advocate for growth in my organization or do I feel inconvenienced when people leave for a higher level position or move up in the company?
- Have I leveraged my position to advocate for others?

05 Encourage and Promote Authenticity

Understand that many work cultures align to the values and behaviors of the dominant culture. This means that, for many, they must learn this culture in order to be successful. Great organizations, however, value cultural diversity. Recognize holidays and observances important to your employees. Don't just provide time off to observe holidays. For employees that speak different languages, dialects, or slang, when appropriate, support its use in the workplace. Create a comfortable environment for people. If you have a workspace that has a cafe, include diverse food and drink options, where possible. Learn about dietary restrictions common to various cultures. Work to minimize employees feeling like they need to be someone else in the workplace. Having to learn and adapt to a specific culture is an added weight on top of an existing workload and can lead to anxiety and stress.

Ask Yourself:

- Am I expecting certain behaviors because it is common to my own culture or identity?
- Do I look down on certain cultural behaviors because of my own lack of cultural awareness (i.e. Do I deem these behaviors as unprofessional, angry, ignorant, or apathetic)?
- Do I give fair treatment all cultural observances when providing time and space?

06 Be Open and Accepting of Feedback

You will stumble and fall on this journey. Understand that feedback, even when it hurts, is valuable information that can help you grow. When someone does the often frightening work of telling you, their leader, that you have done something culturally insensitive, thank them. Let them know that you have listened and that you will take their feedback seriously. Ask clarifying questions and discuss how you could act differently in the future.

Ask Yourself:

- Do I provide time and space for feedback from my employees?
- Am I defensive and angry when people give me negative feedback?
- Do I reflect on people's feedback and use it to inform future actions and decisions?

07

Be Accountable

Go into this work with a clear vision of the inclusive workplace you are building. Develop actionable steps and measurable benchmarks along the way. Share this vision and your goals with a team of people who understand the work and are willing to have honest conversations with you. Meet regularly to discuss your progress and needed interventions. Continue your professional learning by seeking diverse content, attending trainings and conferences, and subscribing to blogs, podcasts, and other digital platforms.

Ask Yourself:

- Do I have a clear understanding of my needs as it relates to creating an inclusive workplace?
- Have I shared my goals with someone who understands the work and will hold me accountable?
- Have I created measurable milestones to track my progress?

Let us help in your journey to a more inclusive workplace!



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Contact Us!

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Seven Ways You Can Start Building A More Inclusive Workplace Today - Reflections

My Name:

My Company:

My Strengths:

Areas of Focus:

Key Takeaways: