Creating Diverse and Inclusive Work Cultures:
10 Ways You can Support Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

The work of diversity, equity and inclusion has evolved considerably over the last few years. More and more organizations are adding equity to their diversity and inclusion strategies with an increased focus on addressing pay and career opportunity gaps and committing the right effort and resources to strategic priorities that purposely focus on providing opportunity to traditionally underrepresented employee groups. With a renewed energy placed on creating workplaces where all employees have equal opportunities for development, growth and advancement comes an organization-wide commitment to the process.

For organizations to truly address Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, it is no longer considered the sole responsibility of the DEI practitioner. Diversity and inclusion are a systemic business imperative that requires leadership capability across the organization. Putting the inclusive leadership tips into action will enable you to play an important and active role in creating workplaces where all employees feel valued and appreciated.

This article offers some concrete tips that will enable you to contribute more fully to your DEI efforts.

1. Understand the company-specific definition for diversity, inclusion and equity. 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 read DEI trade publications, visit diversity web sites as well as sites that speak to specific diverse groups. 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 all your direct reports understand 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. Human resource and/or diversity departments can help you increase the diversity in your group and improve your diversity

management competencies. And reach out to your peers to help build a stronger more powerful voice for change.

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 or sponsor a specific Employee Resource 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. 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 and inclusion 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.