

10 Ways Employees can Support Diversity and Inclusion

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Guest Blog by Robin Pedrelli



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In most organizations, diversity and inclusion is best approached with a top-down, bottom-up strategy. While it's imperative that D&I efforts are supported by the CEO and actively engages leaders, one cannot discount the impact of employee involvement. Engaging employees at all levels is the most effective way to reach critical mass and communicate the import of diversity and inclusion. Often employees are eager to join in the process but lack the know-how and confidence to take action. It is important to let employees know that there are many ways to contribute and support D&I efforts and does not necessarily require expertise in the field.

This article offers some concrete tips that are designed to engage employees at all levels within the organization. Remember it is important to commit to the process, value the thoughts and ideas of everyone, and celebrate along the way.

How Employees Can Support Diversity and Inclusion

1. Know the diversity goals and vision of your organization and its connection to the overall business objectives. Commit to the process by understanding how diversity impacts your role, and how your role impacts the success of the diversity initiative.
2. Participate in employee engagement surveys and respond as openly and honestly as possible. Finding an internal champion with whom you can comfortably express concerns and/or elicit advice can be instrumental in supporting your efforts.
3. Actively engage in the diversity effort. You can take part in or start an Employee Resource Group, or volunteer to chair or serve on committees that organize diversity-related events and activities. Consider becoming a mentor, mentee, or part of a co-mentoring relationship. These activities require a commitment of time, but represent a valuable opportunity for personal and professional development.

4. Become culturally competent. Take the time to learn about different cultures, races, religions and backgrounds represented by your colleagues. Ask your coworkers to share some of the customs and practices associated with their cultures. Become familiar with diversity-related terms and, if you err, apologize and ask for help.
5. Treat people in a way they wish to be treated rather than the way you wish to be treated. Common social activities and practices that are comfortable for you may not be comfortable for everyone. Do not tell offensive jokes that may alienate those who are different from you — even if they are not present at the time. Most importantly, be respectful always. Diversity exists everywhere — not just in the office. Take these diversity principles into your community and your home.
6. Drive positive change in the organization. Be a spokesperson for diversity issues that are not necessarily your own. Any organization will find it difficult to ignore the powerful voice created when groups representing different diversity dimensions unite.
7. Welcome ideas that are different from your own, and support fellow teammates. The creativity that comes with diversity can help you generate new ideas or improve a process already in place. It can also make work more interesting, engaging, and fun.
8. Understand the diversity elements you personally bring to the organization. Diversity comes not only in the form of culture, race, and gender but also includes elements such as socio-economic background, education level, geographic location, sexual orientation, thought, and many others. Each of us brings to the table a lifetime of experiences and knowledge. Each of us is different and adds value to the organization because of these differences.
9. Commit to continuous improvement. Be willing to learn, accept feedback, and listen to the concerns of those around you. Even the most enlightened individual can find opportunities for growth.
1. Communicate and educate. Diversity work is a journey, not a destination. It takes time, patience, and perseverance. Be tolerant of coworkers who do not yet appreciate the value of diversity or who may not always behave respectfully. Often, negative behavior comes from ignorance rather than malice. A willingness to educate can go along way.

Robin Pedrelli is the co-founder and partner of VisionSpring, Inc. VisionSpring, Inc. is a WBENC certified, women owned and operated diversity and inclusion consulting firm offering fully integrated strategy development, workforce planning, training and continuous learning solutions to leverage diversity and inclusion to drive innovation and improved business outcomes. We provide customized strategic solutions that address the specific needs of each client and blend workforce, workplace, marketplace and community related goals.