6 WAYS TO INVOLVE YOUR EMPLOYEES
DE&I INITIATIVE

Research tells us that many organizations are not effectively engaging their employees in their diversity and inclusion initiatives. Furthermore, many diversity stakeholders are frustrated that the process has apparently stalled into a terminal holding pattern. What can be done to revitalize the process and get all employees involved with the organization's diversity and inclusion initiative?

HERE ARE OUR 6 BEST THINKING RECOMMENDATIONS:

1 Include employees in the baselining process to determine how inclusive the organization is and to identify gaps.

Including employees in a survey or focus group process ensures that all voices are heard across a variety of diversity dimensions. Surveys and focus group results point to inclusion thoughts, feelings and concerns, indicate the degree of inclusion and exclusion, assist in building and prioritizing the diversity strategy and in crafting the diversity message and communication plan.

Communicating the overall message then becomes grounded in…"here are some gaps between the data we gathered and the goal of our organization, and these are our strategies and tactics for closing the gaps."

Also involve employees in focus groups for testing out the diversity vision, mission and definition. Be sure to gather input from headquarters, the field, employees and managers, executives, various functional groups and groups in various geographic locations. Their input will assist in determining whether your messages pass the "snicker" test and whether the words and direction have meaning for those it is intended to include.

2 Ensure personal connection to the business case.

Many Diversity Practitioners have established and presented the organization's business case for moving forward with a leveraging diversity strategy to the executive group. We believe the case has been made and move on to implementing the plans. We think we are making progress until we begin to receive feedback that employees don't understand, feel disconnected, can't articulate the vision, mission or definition and aren't acting upon it.

To strengthen involvement and commitment, consider that there are different "audiences" within the organization and that a "one size fits all" business case excludes regional, departmental, functional and business line needs and motivations. In other words, determine who are the various audience groups within your organization and then identify the needs and motivation of each group. Diversity Practitioners can begin by reviewing their current business case and then asking, "Does our business case address all of the various constituencies in the organization?" For example, the Executives are balance sheet focused - they want to know if leveraging diversity and creating inclusion can create more profit and reduce costs. Ensuring a personal connection to the Executives is critical since they approve and provide the funding of the initiative. Managers want to increase the efficiency of and get better resource utilization of their people - they want to hear that diversity and inclusion can improve productivity, quality, customer service and sales results. They also want a business case that is specific to their individual operating company or line of business. Employees want to know how diversity and inclusion increases their career opportunities, decreases their stress and improves their quality of work life.

3 Demonstrate that diversity includes all employees.

Experience shows that this one sounds far easier than it is. Why? Because of the language that

we use and the behaviors that are demonstrated when we talk about and work in the area of diversity. Frequently, the word "diversity" is used indiscriminately and in ways that cause distress and confusion. For example, we require a "diverse slate of candidates"; we say "we want to diversify our workforce"; and "we need more diversity in this team/group/company." No wonder employees are confused and others buy out. Some employees begin to ask, "What does diversity have to do with me?" Employees are also quick to suggest that diversity is warmed over affirmative action and see diversity as a code word.

We can change this perception when our language is accurate and is aligned with organizational behavior. When we say, "Diversity is about all of us," then we must back up the words with actions. We must ensure that no one is excluded from the diversity process. If you want to involve all employees, we must demonstrate that it is for all employees and then provide a place for everyone at the table.

4   Involve employees in tactical elements of the diversity plan.

Clearly, the diversity strategy should align with the overall business strategy of the organization. Again, easier said than done. Most organizations report that they do not have real strategic business alignment throughout the organization, and rarer still is diversity aligned to actual business strategies and tactics. The result, of course, is a diversity strategy that is siloed and plans and activities are disjointed and misaligned with the priorities for the business. For example, if a new product is being produced, marketed, launched, then who is involved from the Diversity Council? If gaining higher levels of customer satisfaction is an organizational strategy, how can tapping into the experiences, knowledge, languages and skills of employees help to meet the goal? Business issues drive diversity strategies and tactics and provide endless ways for employee involvement.

5   Provide employees with skills and tools to help create an inclusive workplace.

If at the end of the day we commit to an inclusive workplace where everyone's contributions are utilized...then, like all other core competencies, employees must have the skills for creating inclusion. Unlike other core job requirements, it is unlikely that we learned inclusion skills during professional training or previous job experiences.

If we identify what inclusion looks like behaviorally, we can model it, teach it, monitor it, hold people accountable for it - expect it. If employees are only given awareness training with no tools or skills, they are left feeling frustrated and wonder ..."Now that I know, what am I supposed to do?" Few, if any organizations, would provide computer, sales or customer service awareness training that offered no tools or skills. Diversity/Inclusion training should be no different. If employees are expected to participate in building an inclusive workplace, they have to know specifically how to assist.

6   Create individual employee accountability.

It has been said too often, "what gets measured gets done." Unfortunately, it is hard to improve on this advice. What we can improve upon is the actual accountability itself, the coaching and expectations that accompany it, the way we word the accountability and the appropriateness of the accountability to the level of employee. Frequently, the accountability is to require an employee to "expand their comfort zone" or to "bring more diversity into the department." If the goal is to create a more inclusive workforce, then provide behavioral accountabilities that lead individuals, departments and the organization to that result.

Keeping these 6 recommendations in mind when implementing your diversity/inclusion initiative could prevent a "ready, aim, fire" course of action and ensure that all employees are engaged and on board.

The Global ERG Network is powered by PRISM - A Talent Dimensions Company and Workrowd, which is a full-service provider of innovative, proven, flexible assessment and measurement systems, consulting services and training programs and products for diversity, equity and inclusion management as well as Human Resource alignment.

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