



The world is in the workplace. It is everywhere we turn and, quite frankly, I love it! The diversity of our country is as evident in offices as it is in factories. In addition to the diversity of race and gender, we also enjoy the diversity of national origin, sexual orientation, language, religion and any number of other factors that joyfully brand us as unique, different.

Understanding the fact that we are wonderfully different, we have a responsibility to create welcome workplaces. These environments are open, inviting places where distinctive talents flourish. Savvy managers work to elicit wide-ranging contributions that further the mission of the organization. These inclusive managers know that they are responsible for encouraging all employees to contribute fully. There are many strategies for building full participation. Consider integrating these five essential management strategies into your leadership approach.

Promote fluid communication

Managers able to build inclusion spend a tremendous amount of time listening. Notice I did not begin with talking. These managers invest their energy hearing the perspectives of

their staff. They inquire regularly so that the shy or reticent know that their input is valued.

These managers make sure that they encourage dialogue between staff members. Just as they want to enjoy the benefits of open communication, they want the same for each person on their team. This horizontal dialogue happens when managers send employees in search of answers. While it is easier to provide answers, it is more important to foster an environment where employees seek answers from peer experts. Not only does this foster peer-to-peer learning, it also creates an environment where communication is the norm. That communication is between peers and with managers.

Invite innovation

Innovation can come from anywhere. When difference is valued, assorted approach-

es can flourish. It is these different approaches that can spark unbelievable innovation.

Managers who are not stuck on the status quo skillfully invite experimentation. They want employees to bring in ideas from their past employers, from their educational preparation and even from their countries of origin. These managers know that answers to complex problems come from a myriad of sources. They understand that the myriad of sources is right there within their reach. It is in the diverse human capital. And that capital is borne of the varied experiences and exposures that each of us brings to the workplace. By inviting full participation, these managers open the door to limitless innovation.

Get comfortable with conflict

Conflict is a fact of life. It can be heightened when there is a lack of understanding, respect or acceptance of difference. Rather than shying away from the inevitable conflicts, it is far more productive to find the roots. Once the roots are identified, you then move to building an understanding of the perspectives presented. This is an important form of bridge building.

As a manager committed to inclusion, it is your job to teach employees how to build those bridges. This means that just as you must get comfortable with conflict, so must they. That comfort includes more than identifying the roots and assorted perspectives, it also includes open discussion of the impact the conflicts are having on the tasks at hand, the team and the individuals. This approach gets people focused on the work and the workplace. They have no time for finger-pointing because you are redirecting the energy to solutions.

Another important point about conflict is that there are ideas imbedded in disagreements. Pay careful attention so that you can capture innovations hidden in consternation. This approach solidifies the fact that you value input from diverse sources even in difficult situations. It also helps employees see worth in opinions other than their own.

Build standards of inclusion

Make inclusion an integral part of the

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modus operandi in your workgroup. This applies to everything from hiring to firing. Put forth every effort to hire in ways that create a mosaic instead of a uniform canvas. This may require you to find nontraditional sources of applicants. It may mean approaching AARP to find retirees for part-time positions. Creating the mosaic may mean approaching organizations that provide workplace skills for the disabled. Whatever new recruiting sources you locate, make sure that those sources broaden your pool of applicants.

Also, remember that diversity goes beyond race and gender. Don't take the easy way out and just search for different races. Instead look for all kinds of people.

Be intolerant of intolerance. That means that pejorative comments, offensive jokes and crude language will be addressed immediately. That behavior can neither be sanctioned nor ignored. It is when these behaviors are allowed to slide that the workplace becomes anything but welcome.

Finally, there is no better way to build standards than to model them. If inclusion is what you seek, it is incumbent upon you to be inclusive. This means that you will be the person comfortable building relationships with people who are markedly different from you. As the model, you must also be open to new approaches. You are responsible for pulling together cross-functional teams that draw on multiple capabilities. Use your influence to foster the cross pollination of ideas and approaches.

Expect missteps

You make mistakes. I make mistakes. We all make mistakes, especially those who feign perfection. Building a welcome workplace is not easy. It takes time, consistent effort and patience. Mistakes will happen on the journey. Those mistakes present endless opportunities for learning (and, occasionally laughter.)

There is a strong tendency for both defensiveness and offensiveness when issues of difference are raised in environments that have yet to become welcome. Expect some of

this difficulty. When you encounter dissension, address it. It is important to talk about difficult issues so that they do not take on a life of their own. Each time that you choose to avoid dissension employees will shy away from attempting to become more inclusive. Make sure that employees understand blunders are to be expected.

Wrap

Welcome words are important. Welcome deeds are lasting. Combine the two and you have the foundation for building a welcome workplace. Each of the five strategies presented, consistently implemented, will take you closer to having a perpetual open house. That open house feel is what makes you an employer embracing the wealth of the world at work.



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