

Inclusive Leadership

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It's time to work on YOU so sit back and listen to practical, actionable advice to accelerate your progress.

Today, we will talk about the importance of inclusive leadership.

By the time we're done, you will have learned how to be more aware of your own personal biases and how to see different points of view when making decisions. You'll also learn more about what makes individuals unique and how to ensure they feel connected to the team.

You will know what steps you should take to collaborate more effectively with others and understand how to hold yourself accountable for improving diversity and inclusion as a leader. We will also talk about how inclusive leadership treats all team members with fairness and respect.

Building inclusive leadership skills is a critical component of being a great business leader and inspiring the best from individuals and teams. When you can use inclusive leadership effectively, the people in your organisation thrive, products and services are elevated, and your business customers win, too. As Jesse Jackson says [1]: "Inclusion is not a matter of political correctness. It is the key to growth."

Inclusive leadership is a crucial issue for organisations because it impacts staff happiness, morale, productivity, talent retention, and the overall growth and success of the organisation.

It's important to understand that the employees don't believe that profits and financial success alone define a great business. Research from Deloitte [2] has shown that they value an inclusive and diverse environment where respect and acceptance are universal standards.

However, the same research shows that the majority of young employees feel that employers don't back up the claims they make on diversity and inclusion. The research states:

Unfortunately, both millennials and Gen Z respondents believe most business leaders, rhetoric notwithstanding, are not truly committed to creating inclusive cultures. Roughly two-thirds of respondents from both generations not only believe leaders simply pay "lip service" to diversity and inclusion, they also believe that only formal legislation can adequately advance workplace diversity.

When business leaders go beyond ticking boxes and integrate diversity and inclusiveness into the culture, there are great opportunities to attract the best talent and retain them long-term.

According to Harvard Business Review, understanding their own biases is essential for managers to be inclusive leaders from employees' perspectives. In an article titled *The Key to Inclusive Leadership* [3], authors Juliet Bourke and Andrea Titus say:

The single most important trait generating a sense of inclusiveness is a leader's visible awareness of bias. But to fully capitalize on their cognizance of bias, leaders also must express both humility and empathy. Organizational practices can help leaders become more inclusive and enhance the performance of their teams.

The research shows that when cognizance - or understanding - of bias is combined with high levels of humility, it can increase feelings of inclusion by up to 25%. When cognizance of bias is combined with high levels of empathy, it can increase feelings of inclusion by up to a third.

To develop an awareness of bias as an individual and an organisation, leaders must develop a few essential skills.

This involves being aware of several sorts of personal prejudices, such as implicit preconceptions, groupthink, and confirmation bias. Leaders must also learn to self-regulate and take remedial actions to maintain fairness when errors or biased judgments are made.

Transparent guidelines for making merit-based selections on promotions and rewards can help leaders ensure they are held more accountable for fairness and biases.

Clearly displaying they understand their biases and being open about that with staff is the most critical aspect of an inclusive manager for their team. However, for leaders themselves, the most critical trait is commitment.

A steadfast commitment to improving diversity and inclusion is the only way to achieve it in an organization. Leaders need to take it on as a personal mission,

holding themselves accountable for improving diversity and inclusion and treating all team members fairly and respectfully.

Leaders must understand what makes individuals unique and ensure they feel connected to the team while being adaptable and able to meet the needs of others and work through obstacles.

After awareness of biases and a commitment to inclusiveness, collaboration is another essential skill for leaders who want to imbue an organisation with an inclusive culture.

Collaboration allows individuals to question and expand on one another's ideas, which leads to creativity. Assembling diverse teams while minimising the sense of preference among members will create inclusive teams that can cooperate and push one another to achieve extraordinary things.

As Alan Joyce, CEO of Qantas Airways, says [4]:

We have a very diverse environment and a very inclusive culture, and those characteristics got us through the tough times. Diversity generated a better strategy, better risk management, better debates, and better outcomes.

Collaboration helps build trust between people, which leads to everyone feeling comfortable speaking up and expressing new ideas.

By fostering collaboration, leaders can also empower teams to handle conflict and work through difficult situations together towards a solution.

There are a few important things that leaders should also be careful to avoid when building an inclusive culture. One of those is assimilation.

Assimilation can occur amongst employees when minorities feel their culture is not dominant. This means they're more likely to attempt to blend in and assimilate into the existing culture. In other words, they adopt the organisation's traits and ideals to blend in. By integrating this way, individuals risk losing their unique viewpoint, which can be a significant loss to the organisation. To really collaborate and help teams reach their full potential, leaders must understand and appreciate people's lived experiences.

Staff recruited via corporate diversity programs only to be treated as if they lack the same intellect or capacity as their peers causes a sense of dehumanisation [5]. Unintentional collateral harm can be avoided by carefully planning your diversity and inclusion activities.

Another thing to avoid is tokenism.

Tokenism is common, and as research from Deloitte showed, tokenism can happen when organisations intend to be inclusive, but only a tiny percentage of individuals from underrepresented groups are recruited to be part of a diverse team. When this occurs, organisations do not benefit from diverse viewpoints, backgrounds, and cooperation. Individuals from underrepresented groups may feel embarrassed or exploited if they believe they are merely there to tick a box.

We've talked about the importance of inclusive leadership, some of the key strategies and traits leaders need to employ, as well as the pitfalls to avoid. So now, let's look at a few practical steps leaders can take to improve their skillset around inclusive leadership.

Leaders should encourage collaboration and respect differences by offering employees a variety of ways to contribute opinions and ideas and introducing strategies such as collaborative meeting agendas so that everyone can contribute to important meetings.

Leaders can also show their commitment to diversity and inclusion by setting publicly available targets with accountability for meeting them and regular reviews. This could include measuring commitment to diversity and inclusiveness by analysing new hires or promotion rates by factors such as race, gender, and disability status.

One of the most powerful things leaders can commit to is acknowledging bias and owning up to mistakes. The courage to admit mistakes and show humility can be one of the hardest traits for anyone to develop. It feels counterintuitive to challenge your own decisions or question that you might not have the right answers for a certain task.

As Roy T. Bennet says [6]: "It takes guts and humility to admit mistakes. Admitting we're wrong is courage, not weakness."

Courage in leadership can also include being willing to learn and develop and admit you still don't know everything.

Today, we have looked at the importance of inclusive leadership to help individuals and teams thrive. We discussed how businesses that go beyond tokenism could attract and keep talented employees. We discussed the need to avoid assimilation and dehumanization to get the most from diverse teams by enabling collaboration and creativity instead.

We also learned how important it is for leaders to take on a strong personal commitment to an inclusive culture, with awareness of their own biases and accountability for their own decisions and mistakes playing a key role in how inclusive employees feel their workplace feels.

This week I'd like you to think about some of your own biases when making decisions and one or two examples where you feel your built-in biases influenced your choices. How would you objectively make the same decisions without biases involved?

That's all for today. Thanks for listening, and remember: keep building the best you.

[1] *5 diversity and inclusion quotes for the workplace*, Shannon Howard (2019)
<https://www.predictiveindex.com/blog/5-diversity-and-inclusion-quotes-for-the-workplace/>

[2] *The Deloitte Millennial Survey 2018*, Deloitte (2018)
<https://www2.deloitte.com/tr/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/millennialsurvey-2018.html>

[3] *The Key to Inclusive Leadership*, Juliet Bourke & Andrea Titus (2020)
<https://hbr.org/2020/03/the-key-to-inclusive-leadership>

[4] *The diversity and inclusion revolution: Eight powerful truths*, Juliet Bourke (2018)
<https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/deloitte-review/issue-22/diversity-and-inclusion-at-work-eight-powerful-truths.html>

[5] *Dehumanization in organizational settings: some scientific and ethical considerations*, Kalina Christoff (2014)
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4173804/>

[6] *It takes guts and humility to admit mistakes. Admitting we're wrong is courage, not weakness*, Roy T. Bennett (2017)
<https://twitter.com/inspiringthinkn/status/943000572709421056>