

A Comprehensive Guide to Strategies and Benefits of Building a Diverse Workplace



Introduction

As workforces shift and evolve technologically and interpersonally, it's no wonder diversity in the workplace is a critical, ongoing discussion organizations need to be having.

Building diversity programs, infrastructure, and strategy for a truly inclusive workplace should blanket your entire business model, from onboarding and employee engagement to C-suite decision-making.

In this guide, you'll find useful information highlighting the benefits of workplace diversity; the challenges of creating an inclusive environment at work; ways to bolster your strategy and continually improve; and common mistakes workplaces make when they're trying to implement diversity initiatives.

What is “Diversity in the Workplace?”

Workplace diversity is the practice of hiring people from diverse cultural and professional backgrounds. Categories that express diversity in the workplace might include race, gender, ethnicity, age, religion, sexual orientation, citizenship, military service, and more.

Our modern understanding of this became the Affirmative Action policies of the 1960s, where lawmakers began to roll out policies to prevent discrimination based on race, religion, and national origin. However, according to Cornell Law School, affirmative action as a concept can be traced back to the 19th century.

The United States Department of Labor states, “Affirmative action must be taken by covered employers to recruit and advance qualified minorities, women, persons with disabilities, and covered veterans.” Equal opportunity employment is protected by organizations like the Civil Rights Center and the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission.

In previous years, the concept “diverse workplace” was all too often used as an empty buzzword to appeal to job-seekers. However, according to the National Association of

Colleges and Employer (NACE), employers are increasingly relying on diverse recruiting efforts.

Benefits of Diversity in the Workplace

- *Improves Team Performance.* Team members will be encouraged by continued education, training, and programming that shows the company is invested in human talent through diversity, inclusion, and professional development policies.
- *Attracts the Best Talent.* An organization that people want to work for doesn't just have snacks in the breakroom or a good vacation policy. This doesn't always have to equal an external recruitment agency. Your workforce can become brand advocates when they are truly invested in working for a diverse employer.
- *Fosters Open Communication.* A company built around inclusivity as a core value can avoid the erosion of morale that comes with group-think. When perspectives and ideas aren't openly encouraged, even your top performing employees will fear being "wrong." A diverse workforce is also one that feels comfortable with speaking up and bringing their unique skills to the job.
- *Increases Your Innovation.* Harvard Business Review conducted a survey of over 1,700 companies in 2018 which claimed "the most-diverse enterprises were also the most innovative" in terms of profit and their revenue models.

Why You Need An Evolving Diversity & Inclusion Strategy

Addressing your strategy for an inclusive workplace once and never revisiting it is a disservice to anyone who works for or with you. Instead, you can make changes and iterate your diversity strategy as you go. 

- Open lines of communication in your organization. Be receptive to feedback (both good and bad)
- Set benchmarks and goals, which your team regularly re-evaluates
- Partner with vendors specializing in bias reduction, sensitivity training, and more
- Audit your hiring processes to make sure you are putting your policies into practice

Common Mistakes Made in Implementing Diversity Programs

No organization will perfectly implement their diversity strategy on the first try, or without a road map. Here are some common mistakes that you can avoid as you build an inclusive culture.

They Reinforce Stereotypes About Diversity Programs

Diversity programs can unknowingly perpetuate stereotypes and policies that harm both the workforce and the individual employee.

When there is an emphasis on diversity without infrastructure and safe expression, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) and marginalized groups can feel unseen, uncomfortable, and responsible for managing how fellow co-workers perceive or treat them.

If those in positions of power or influence bristle at diversity programs, or want to hire to meet quarterly goals, this does a serious disservice to employees.

They Perpetuate Tokenism

According to Mirriam-Webster, tokenism is “the policy or practice of making only a symbolic effort.” In the workplace, this may display as groups thinking one individual speaks for an entire population.

When companies turn to one member as a “star player” for a group, this not only can breed resentment, but make your star players uncomfortable speaking for anyone beyond themselves.

Vanderbilt University held a 2018 panel on ways businesses can eliminate tokenism through three pillars: diversity, equity, and inclusion. Everyone should have equitable access to professional development, training, and networking opportunities.

One way tokenism can show up at work is how a workplace handles generational differences. Millennials and Gen Z workers, as they enter the workforce, can experience uncomfortable comments about their proficiency at technology or affinity with social media. Pew Research Center identifies millennials as “anyone born between 1981 and 1996.”

In short, assuming someone is good at social media because they’re a new college graduate isn’t a helpful practice. Just because someone is a “digital native” doesn’t mean comments or assumptions on their performance can be predicted, which is also an example of ageism at work.

They Perpetuate Ageism

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), ageism is “the stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination against people on the basis of their age.” To that end, ageism is more than an insidious type of workplace discrimination— it’s a health issue woven into the fabric of our society. The American Psychological Association, too, claims that perpetuating stereotypes about aging can affect mental health.

Diversity programs that attempt to bridge generational gaps but lack sensitivity to the experiences of their employees can perpetuate ageist stereotypes, alienate groups, and harm morale.

Similarly, if two individuals in the same role (e.g. a marketing manager) have wildly different salary figures but similar work experience and years in their industry, this must be addressed.

There's a Lack of C-Suite Implementation

When companies use entry-level hires or interns to add to “a diversity quota,” this is harmful for a number of reasons. Because the workforce has disproportionately favored certain populations (i.e. caucasian males in positions of power), BIPOC, veterans, LGBTQ+ job-seekers, and other marginalized groups are already at a disadvantage before they even apply, let alone secure the job offer.

Diversity quotas imply that a talented employee isn’t a living, breathing human being with thoughts and ideas. Quotas also are not representative of decision-making power.

When your diversity and inclusion initiatives don’t start from the top and trickle down, this rings false to any effort the company is making toward an inclusive environment.

A study by Yello concluded that 70% of employees surveyed were “reluctant to accept a job from a company that claims it is diverse but doesn’t have any executive leaders

from underrepresented groups.” In short, a truly diverse workplace has diverse decision-makers.

They Don’t Stick With the Strategy

Even giants like Google aren’t immune to making cuts to critically informative diversity programs. Not sticking to your guns when it comes to workforce inclusivity is a short-sighted move for enterprise companies who want to be thought-leaders and workplace diversity experts. After all, when you have models and systems that work, you can effectively teach and scale them for others.

☒What to Do if Your Company Lacks Diversity?

Rome wasn’t built in a day; neither will an inclusive, diverse organization built for the right reasons.

Diversity in the workplace isn’t a one-time action. There’s no magic wand to make harmful, excluding habits go away. Companies who succeed are ones that make a commitment to lifelong improvement. They listen (without interrupting!) to the perspectives of their employees, and they keep learning.

Another resource in your company’s toolkit to implement a strong, consistent D&I (diversity and inclusion) strategy is to work with change communications solutions like GuideSpark. End to end communication strategies like employee engagement campaigns, talent management planning, and customized solutions for your unique business case.

Source: [GuideSpark](#)