How to Create a More Inclusive Workplace



Early in this new year, during February, the month of love, why not review your policies and practices to ensure yours is an inclusive workplace? And this time, why not go beyond the must-dos to create a culture that truly offers opportunity for all?

Sure, you already know about employment discrimination and yes, you also hire and recruit with attention to diversity. But often it's the seemingly small changes that, collectively, can make a big difference.

Here are three examples.

New mothers and employment opportunities. When considering internal candidates for a promotion that involves frequent travel, don't automatically exclude qualified new mothers. By doing so, you are making an assumption about these employees – an assumption that could turn out to be wrong and potentially discriminatory. Such a practice certainly doesn't lend itself to creating an inclusive workplace, and it may cause you to overlook the perfect candidate for the position. Make sure all department managers know it is the organization's practice to consider qualified women for all promotions, regardless of whether they are new mothers. It's not only the right thing to do; it will help further your reputation as a progressive employer, one that advances women in the workplace.

Religious accommodation with regard to dress codes. As you establish workplace dress codes and related policies, be sure to consider religious attire. Indicate that the organization respects workers' religious beliefs and the clothing associated with those beliefs. Don't assume employees will approach you; take the initiative. By letting employees know you willingly accommodate their religious beliefs, you make them feel accepted. As important, you send a message that the organization strives to be inclusive.

Accommodations for people with disabilities. Don't wait until people with disabilities apply for open positions before you become familiar with assistive technologies and other tools for accommodation. Seek out resources, like the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), to become educated about available options. Doing so will give you an understanding of what is necessary and allow you to have intelligent conversations with hiring managers and candidates. Here again, taking the initiative sends a message of inclusion.

Creating an inclusive workplace requires attention to creating equal opportunities for everyone – including, among others, women, visible minorities, and aboriginal

people; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender employees; people with disabilities; and people of different religions.

So go ahead, check your policies and practices to see how your organization might improve. This year, why not aim to become a best company?