

Listening to Learn:

Navigating the Conversations of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace

As business leaders, we strive to create a work environment that is inclusive and welcoming for all team members. Over the past few weeks, we've found ourselves in conversations regarding race, equality and inclusion that may be new or uncomfortable for many of us. Understanding the key concepts regarding this discussion, and learning how to constructively engage in these conversations, will be key to supporting your team in creating an inclusive culture. During this session, we will learn more about the key concepts behind equality, diversity and inclusion. We will share ideas and resources to help you grow as a leader and prepare you to support your team in these conversations.

Equality

Definition

According to the Cambridge dictionary, the definition of equality is “the right of different groups of people to have a similar social position and receive the same treatment.”

In this section, we will be discussing how to implement equality in the workplace and how business owners, managers, and team leaders can start the framework today.

How to Implement

Provide an Open Forum

As cliché as it is, it starts from the top down. Providing an open forum is not only good for your lower-level employees, but also the high ranking ones. If everyone feels safe in speaking, then more people will.

Create an anonymous box or survey, it can be virtual or physical, that employees can drop in comments anonymously. Or create a weekly or biweekly team bonding activity that allows members to participate in discussions without worrying about project deadlines.

Upon looking at the results of this anonymous box or anonymous survey, be sure to put more weight on comments that are in the minority. For example, if the majority of people commented that the coffee is great, look at the answers that say otherwise more closely. Maybe there is some truth that you need to change coffee brands.

All Employees Deserve Respect

Certain conflicts get reported to HR or to a manager, but not all. This doesn't mean it doesn't go unnoticed. Encourage managers and others to work with employees to address all conflicts. By not addressing one or more, it can lead to disharmony among the team.

During your team member bonding session, you can bring up generalized situations that resemble what has occurred and start a discussion concerning the actions and what lessons can be drawn.

There is No Time Limit

When team members feel they only have a limited time to speak or address issues, they might feel trapped. Having an open environment with no time limit to discuss situations encourages an atmosphere of acceptance.

Make it known to your employees or team members that whenever they feel comfortable, they can voice their concerns. There is no end date. If a situation occurred in March, they are welcome to share in December or the next year. By stating this and emphasizing this, employees will not feel pressured or uncomfortable.

Diversity

Definition

According to the Cambridge dictionary, the definition of diversity is “the fact of many different types of things or people being included in something; a range of different things or people.”

In this section, we will be discussing how to achieve diversity in the workplace and how business owners, managers and team leaders can start the framework today.

How to Achieve

Vulnerability is Attractive

We grew up in a society where we have to be “hard” and “firm.” “Stick to our guns,” is the saying. But, this does not lead to a welcoming environment. Being vulnerable is attractive and it will attract better employees. Employees that feel that their presence matters and is valued will stay and will work even harder.

A way to show vulnerability is to have one-on-one’s with your different team members or employees. Grab a coffee together or eat lunch together and talk about life outside of work and outside of projects. Within teams, encourage the different members to share personal stories about themselves.

You are Part of the Solution

You and your team are part of the solution. Every little step we can take is a huge step in the overall direction of increasing diversity. The phrase is “accepting the problem is the first step in resolving it.” Now is the time to also accept that we are part of the solution. It is not enough to just state there is a problem, but we have to make active steps to resolve it.

One of the best ways to start making steps is to discuss with your hiring manager and reassess your interview questions to be more accepting of a diverse set of applicants. When looking at employees to promote, look through the same lens as hiring new employees. Promote and give raises to those who also spread the same message of equality, diversity and inclusion.

A good way to reevaluate questions or improve the interview process is to have multiple people involved in the hiring process. Though it is intimidating for the interviewee, having three people involved in the interview process, as an example, will help make sure biases don’t come into play when promoting or hiring. It would even be better to have the interview panel or the committee in charge of hiring be diverse to accommodate different views on candidates.

Understand Your Own Goals

Through all of this, understand your own goal. Why are you doing all of this? Be clear as to what diversity means to you and how it will help your business grow. Because, it will help your business grow. As the saying goes, “multiple minds are better than one.” And, multiple diverse minds are even better. A diverse team will give you new ideas for marketing, for products, for anything that will bring your business to new heights.

Inclusion

Definition

According to the Cambridge dictionary, the definition of inclusion is “the act of including someone or something as part of a group, or a person or that that is included.”

In this section, we will be discussing how to start an inclusion culture in the workplace and how business owners, managers and team leaders can start the framework today.

How to Start

Include Self-Awareness in Trainings

Often, people do not realize when they say or do something that offends someone else. By including self-awareness into training, situations that are awkward or uncomfortable for either party can be either avoided or reduced.

Self-Awareness can be added to the employee onboarding training sessions and can also be implemented into continuing training sessions you might incorporate throughout the year. Remember, it is a never ending process. We can always learn and grow.

Sharing is Caring

Encourage employees to share their unique diverse experience. By sharing experiences, others can understand more about the different backgrounds and views of their fellow team members. This will also break the comfort zone barrier. The more team members get to know each other, the more likely they will be successful together. As humans, it is natural to linger with those who are similar to us, but promoting a culture of sharing will let teams leap over this barrier.

You can even turn it into a game. The more team members you get to know, you receive a prize at the end of the month or quarter. You will probably see that, eventually, people do not even need the prizes, the interaction alone among their teammates will be enough to keep engaging.

Remember, It's a Discussion, Not an Argument

When situations do occur, do not "argue" to win. Enable employees and other high level executives to discuss the situation in detail and to see all sides. Build a code of conduct that provides a framework for individuals to be heard and remind employees and team members of this.

This also starts at the top. When an employee comes into your office, the best option is to listen to the situation and talk through the solution rather than scolding or commenting on the bad that occurred. One principle to use is the "sandwich method." This is where you give a complement or acknowledgment that is positive, then you will mention what needs to be improved upon, and then another positive. When they see the leader doing it, they will also incorporate it into their own team interactions.

Conclusion

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion are topics to be taken seriously and things can be implemented now in order to bolster your own company, teams, employees and clients. The more voices we can add into our team, the stronger we will be as a company.

What are some things you can implement in your business today? How about this month? The next 6 months? Writing your goals is the first step to achieving them.

Here are our recommendations:

1. Update your code of conduct book to include equality, diversity and inclusion
2. Incorporate self-awareness training into your existing training
3. Re-evaluate questions for new hires or promotion opportunities
4. Encourage team members to get to know each other
5. Create team bonding activities regularly
6. Create an anonymous box or survey
7. Establish a no time limit rule for discussions about any situation
8. Establish the sandwich method when discussing situations
9. Get to know your employees and or team members on an individual level
10. Never stop listening and learning