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Building diversity and inclusion: A modern guide

There are countless ways that you can build and invest in diversity and inclusion. Here are just a few.

By **Leanne Bernhardt** | February 11, 2020

To appropriately prioritize diversity and inclusion, leadership needs to be passionate and enthusiastically support internal initiatives. (Photo: Shutterstock)

According to McKinsey, companies who have greater diversity across their workforce see greater profitability and value creation. Strong diversity and inclusion programs (https://www.benefitspro.com/sites/benefitspro/2019/09/19/greater-gender-diversity-brings-better-employee-experiences/)attract top talent to help drive innovation and results, and increasingly, both current employees and future hires expect it.

With our own team growing, we've been hard at work to figure out what our diversity and inclusion program looks like and how we can strengthen it. If you're in the early stages of creating and rolling out a program, it can be overwhelming. After decades leading HR and People initiatives, one of the biggest things that I've

learned is that you have to dip your toes in and just try something to get started. Don't let perfection hold back progress.

Related: Diversity, inclusion and belonging: How do we get there? (https://www.benefitspro.com/sites/benefitspro/2019/06/11/diversity-inclusion-and-belonging-how-do-we-get-there/)

It's not going to be perfect the first time around, but if you prioritize a couple of initiatives, the momentum will come. Moreover, companies are constantly evolving. What your diversity and inclusion program looks like on Day One will look very different on Day 365. There are countless ways that you can build and invest in diversity and inclusion; here are a few ways that we've been making headway:

Leveraging data for pay equity

Annually, as a company, we look back at how men and women in sales organizations are paid across industries to better understand the pay gap. Through our anonymized data, we learned that despite being underrepresented across nearly all industries, women tend to hit or exceed their quotas, but are paid less in salary and commissions over time. That said, the average representation of female sales managers is 26 percent.

Data has been an incredible tool for us to understand what we have to work with and where we need to make improvements. Knowing that women-led teams perform better was something that we took to heart and gave us the impetus to find more ways that we could bring women into our organization.

I encourage companies to embrace their internal data (https://www.benefitspro.com/sites/benefitspro/2020/01/31/pay-equity-analysis-the-full-picture/), from pay, to demographics to attrition rates, to stay competitive. You never know what you might uncover and learn. Although we are making positive strides in terms of equitable pay, there is still a lot of work to be done. Regardless of whether you're a part of a sales organization or not, leveraging data around pay should be a core pillar of diversity and inclusion programs.

Boosting diversity around hiring

According to the Harvard Business Review, men apply for a job when they meet only 60 percent of the qualifications, but women will only apply when they meet 100 percent of them. Removing gender-centric language in job descriptions and using gender-neutral pronouns is a start to boosting diversity around hiring, but also focusing on how the roles and responsibilities are laid out can have a significant impact when it comes to attracting more women and broadening your talent pool.

For example, we moved from a simple roles and responsibilities section to job descriptions centered around specific skill sets. We also identified what projects an employee could expect to work on in the first 3, 6 and 9-month mark. In less than a year, we saw an uptick of 30% more female applicants and increased the number of female executives at the company.

Additionally, closely looking at the makeup of your hiring panels can have an impact on diversity. Finding ways to make your hiring team more heterogeneous in terms of gender, job functions, backgrounds, etc. can boost diversity during the decision-making process and your employee base in the long-term.

Fostering culture through affinity groups

For many organizations, building affinity groups is a challenge. One of the first things that you need is to ensure that you have executive support. To appropriately prioritize diversity and inclusion, leadership needs to be passionate and enthusiastically support internal initiatives.

Another mistake I commonly see is companies waiting until they have the resources to build affinity groups. One way that we have maneuvered this is by splitting up responsibilities and ownership between a handful of people who are already involved and engaged in the company culture. More often than not, you'll find that there are always people who want to be heard and feel like they are a part of the change.

Celebrating holidays and events for underrepresented minorities, like Black History Month or Pride Week, and making them a corporate-wide initiative can also bring attention and awareness to affinity groups.

Diversity and inclusion isn't just another target that companies need to meet. If done well, the short and long term impacts on engagement, performance and retention can be significant. Whether big or small, we must all remember that we have a role to play and can all embrace differences and build richer work environments.

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Read more:

- **Diversity and inclusion highlight list of emerging employer trends (https://www.benefitspro.com/sites/benefitspro/2019/04/09/diversity-and-inclusion-highlight-list-of-emerging-employer-trends/)**
- **10 best workplaces for diversity (https://www.benefitspro.com/sites/benefitspro/2018/12/17/10-best-workplaces-for-diversity/)**
- **Shareholders, workers call on Google to fix 'diversity crisis' (https://www.benefitspro.com/sites/benefitspro/2019/01/30/shareholders-workers-call-on-google-to-fix-diversity-crisis/)**