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From Diversity to Inclusion: The Power of Leadership &Team Building: 3 Proven Strategies for Leaders to Create Unbreakable Teams While Navigating Workplace Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Challenges

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About DEI (adapted for learning purposes)

INTRODUCTION

People will typically be more enthusiastic where they feel a sense of belonging and see themselves as part of a community than they will in a workplace in which each person is left to his own devices. –Alfie Kohn

Did you know that a third of your life will be spent at work? That adds up to 9,000 days and 72,000 hours at the office. Your level of satisfaction at work matters because it can determine the quality of your overall well-being.

Many employees are waking up to the realization that their job satisfaction isn't predicted by salary increases and bonuses alone. It is also impacted by the sense of belonging they feel at work. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, a sense of belonging falls on the third level. Human beings not only need food and water to survive but to feel like they belong in a community.

While the workplace isn't necessarily a place where you go to make friends, the general attitude and mindset you have toward work and fellow coworkers can cultivate a sense of belonging. There is nothing worse than having the "Sunday Blues," where you start feeling anxious just thinking about stepping into a work environment that doesn't value nor accommodate your needs as an employee.

Before we go any further, we must define what exactly we are speaking about when mentioning diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). First and foremost, DEI is a term used to describe programs and policies that seek to promote the participation and representation of minority and marginalized social groups at work. These groups may be categorized by age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, culture, and sexual orientation.

As separate terms, diversity refers to differences in people, ranging from their cultures to their work styles and personalities. Elements of diversity include demographics, educational background, socio-economic status, marital status, physical abilities, and mental abilities. Diverse teams are those that embrace differences amongst team members rather than advocating for uniformity in identity and expression.

Equity is often confused with equality, although they refer to different concepts. Equality means treating every employee the same and offering them the same amount of resources and opportunities. On the surface, this is what every organization wants—to treat employees equally. However, diverse teams consist of employees who did not receive the same start in life and therefore enter the workplace already at a loss.

For example, even though men and women have the right to work, women enter the workforce

at a disadvantage due to balancing caregiving at home and still putting in the hours to advance their careers. This heavy load on their shoulders has a ripple effect when it comes to their career and financial advancement. Equity goes beyond equality and seeks to recognize each employee's background, which impacts their performance and development at work, then award resources and opportunities according to their unique circumstances.

Then we have the third concept of inclusion,

The best way to understand who is represented by DEI programs and policies is to consider minority and marginalized groups in society; the same social dynamics and hierarchies are often reinforced at work, which is why there are efforts to correct these inequalities.

For instance, statistics show that in 2020, women earned 80 cents for every dollar earned by men; and women only occupied 26% of leadership roles (Gitnux, 2023). More recent statistics published in 2023 show that ethnic minorities

that respond to these core values of human relations and spend over $8 billion a year on programs and training initiatives to support teams in adopting these values (Williams & Dolkas, 2022). Yet despite investing so much into these initiatives, data shows that not much has changed. In fact, one research study showed that the positive results of some DEI programs only last for about two days.

There are plenty of reasons why some DEI programs don't work. The first is the unrealistic

which refers to making sure that every employee feels accepted at work. This concept is closely tied to the sense of belonging that we all desire to feel when placed in a group setting. Inclusive teams are those that create and reinforce a culture of open communication, collaboration, and participation. Essentially, by improving diversity and equity, teams are able to become more inclusive and establish a positive and supportive work environment.

(i.e., marginalized ethnic groups such as the Hispanic, Asian, African American, American Indian, and Alaska Native) make up 10% of the entire workforce and 6% of senior management positions. Moreover, 24% of Hispanic and African American employees report experiencing discrimination at work, compared to 15% of Caucasian employees (Gitnux, 2023a).

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are hot topics in the corporate world right now. U.S. companies have gone as far as creating specific departments

expectations placed on employees to change after attending a once-off training workshop or weekend team-building. Another reason is implementing DEI programs without adjusting workplace policies and systems. While the programs are good, the fundamental structures of the organizations don't support positive change. Research conducted by Deloitte also showed that DEI programs were more likely to be sustainable and help to achieve business outcomes when coupled with inclusive leadership (Hawley, 2023).

To avoid spending hundreds of thousands, if not millions of dollars, on DEI policies and programs that look good on paper but have no real impact, it is important to take a moment and learn how diverse, equitable, and inclusive teams and cultures are built.

IN SUMMARY

Undertaking DEI initiatives can be uncomfortable due to the type of conversations that need to be had, which require employees to step outside of their comfort zones. However, prioritizing DEI is the best way to attract and retain the best talent and invest in the growth of your company.