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TIPS, TOOLS & INTELLIGENCE  
FOR DEVELOPING TALENT

JULY 2017  
ISSUE 1707

## BUILDING BLOCKS OF WORKPLACE INCLUSION

Evelina Silveira and Jill Walters



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HUMAN CAPITAL

# BUILDING BLOCKS OF WORKPLACE INCLUSION



## AUTHORS

### Evelina Silveira

Evelina Silveira is the president of Diversity at Work, a three-time award-winning training and consulting firm in London, Canada. She is also the editor of the *Inclusion Quarterly* and has co-authored two books about workplace inclusion with Jill Walters.

### Jill Walters

Jill Walters is publisher of the monthly online newsletter, *Diversity! in the Workplace* ([www.diversityintheworkplace.ca](http://www.diversityintheworkplace.ca)). She also is the co-author, with Evelina Silveira, of *Diversity and Inclusion on a Budget: How to Have a More Engaged and Innovative Workplace With Little or No Dollars* and *The No-Nonsense Guide to Workplace Inclusion*.

### Community Manager, Human Capital

Ann Parker

### Editor, TD at Work

Patty Gaul

### Managing Editor

Teresa Preston

### Production Design

Iris Sanchez

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Printed in the United States of America.

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*TD at Work* (ISSN 2373-5570, Electronic ISSN 2373-5589, ISBN 978-1-56286-742-3, Electronic ISBN 978-1-60728-913-5) is published monthly by the Association for Talent Development, 1640 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22314. *TD at Work* is available for subscription in print or digitally. The subscription rate for the Monthly All-Access (12 print and digital issues, plus archive access) is \$99 (ATD national members) and \$139 (nonmembers). The monthly digital subscription rate for 12 issues is \$69 (ATD national members) and \$99 (nonmembers). Periodicals postage paid at Alexandria, Virginia, and additional entries. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *TD at Work*, 1640 King Street Alexandria, VA 22314. Claims for replacement of subscription issues not received must be made within three months of the issue date. Copyright © July 2017 *TD at Work* and ATD. All rights reserved. No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or information storage and retrieval systems—without the express written permission of the publisher. For permission requests, please go to [www.copyright.com](http://www.copyright.com), or contact Copyright Clearance Center (CCC), 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923 (telephone: 978.750.8500, fax: 978.646.8600). ATD Press grants permission for the material on page 17-19 to be reproduced for personal use.

**A**ttaining a diverse workforce today is not as difficult as it used to be because many of the groups who were traditionally left out as contenders and applicants in the recruitment process are now fully participating. But if you want an inclusive workplace, mastering the art of recruiting a diverse workplace is not enough.

Some organizations think that having “one of each”—a woman, a person with a disability, someone from a religious minority, a mature worker, a gay employee, an indigenous person, and an employee from another visible minority—means that you are inclusive. Wrong! All it means is that you have a wide variety of people who may have divergent perspectives working for you.

It's a fact: You can have diversity and not inclusion. While the face of your organization may appear diverse, there also may be constant in-fighting and diversity dilemmas. So the challenge really becomes how to have all of these people work together and share the same organizational goal. This is where inclusion comes in.

Inclusion is about harnessing the diversity you have to create a workplace where employees are respected and sincerely involved in a way that translates into value for the organization. Easier said than done? Definitely!

When it comes to creating an inclusive culture, many organizations don't know where to begin. But although it's a cliché to say, “begin at the beginning,” that is, in fact, exactly what you have to do. But relax. It's not as overwhelming as you may think. Inclusion won't happen overnight, but it will happen if you intentionally work toward it.

In this issue of *TD at Work*, you will learn:

- the importance of creating a mission statement, vision statement, and value statement around inclusion
- how to establish an action plan
- best practices for developing an inclusive organization
- steps to creating a workplace inclusion committee
- how to develop an employee-friendly workplace.

## GETTING UNDERWAY

As Deborah Gillis, president and CEO of Catalyst, said to *HRM America*, “Leaders must be mindful of what makes employees feel included, and excluded, and develop skills that can help their companies attain inclusion for the long term.” Let's get started on building that understanding.

So you've hired staff that hits all the marks and has all the hallmarks of a diverse workforce: women, indigenous peoples, visible minorities, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex) individuals, and mature workers. How do you help all these diverse groups get along? To feel a part of the whole? To make their work experience rewarding? And, in the long run, to just be able to be themselves? Having an inclusion strategy will keep you on track.

INCLUSION IS ABOUT HARNESSING THE DIVERSITY YOU HAVE TO CREATE A WORKPLACE WHERE EMPLOYEES ARE RESPECTED AND SINCERELY INVOLVED IN A WAY THAT TRANSLATES INTO VALUE FOR THE ORGANIZATION.

Experience has shown us that organizations that adopt an inclusion strategy embed the value of workplace inclusion into everything they do. They live and breathe it, and their strategic plan is a living testament to their commitment to make their organization a better place.

Evelina Silveira has conducted many training sessions that were just a one-time gig for an organization, not attached to a larger plan. Not surprisingly, those organizations continue to struggle because there is no concerted effort to create a strategy that can address the challenges presented.

It's critical that the strategic plan you develop is unique to your organization. Don't fret, we won't leave you hanging. To follow is a step-by-step process on how to get started, complete with examples and resources.

## DEVELOPING AN INCLUSION STRATEGY

A workplace diversity and inclusion strategy does not occur in isolation. It is a written policy that expresses your resolute belief that diversity and inclusion must become part of the organizational culture. This commitment is demonstrated by establishing consistent policies and organizational systems.

First off, there must be buy-in from the top. In other words, there should be a firm, transparent, demonstrated conviction that inclusion is tied to the business goals, objectives, and bottom line of the organization. This is your starting point. Once you have this, rolling out the strategy will be much easier and more worthwhile because the leadership team is on your side.

Your workplace inclusion strategic plan should include objectives for at least three areas:

- *Customers.* This might include a goal of expanding into the global marketplace. For example, how might the organization's products enter the South Asian market?
- *Employees.* A possible goal would be to increase the retention rates of women professionals.
- *Community.* This might entail donating time and financial resources to worthy causes employees have identified.

The strategic plan also should include what are generally known as the organization's mission, vision, and values. Establishing these helps pave the way to achieving a more inclusive workplace.

### Mission Statement

A mission statement must be not only clear and linked to the company's identity but also motivating and encouraging. When developing your mission statement, you must first of all consider why your organization was initially started. This helps you be clear about what you want to achieve with, for example, your clients, target population, and community stakeholders. While it may not seem immediately apparent, all of these constituents can benefit from your commitment to workplace diversity and inclusion.

See, for example, this mission statement for Johns Hopkins Medicine:

The mission of Johns Hopkins Medicine is to improve the health of the community and the world by setting the standard of excellence in medical education, research, and clinical care. Diverse and inclusive, Johns Hopkins Medicine educates medical students, scientists, healthcare professionals, and the public; conducts biomedical research; and provides patient-centered medicine to prevent, diagnose, and treat human illness.

A WORKPLACE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGY DOES NOT OCCUR IN ISOLATION. IT IS A WRITTEN POLICY THAT COMMITS TO A FIRM AND RESOLUTE BELIEF THAT DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION MUST BECOME PART OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE.

### Vision Statement

The vision statement sets your desired goal and defines your future. It promotes and incites action, and it motivates and generates a high level of commitment to achieving the organization's goals.

Vision statements used to cover five or 10 years or more. Now, given the continuous and rapid change occurring in market conditions, it's more common to find vision statements crafted for between one and five years.

Like your mission statement, your vision statement should take into consideration the interests of your customers or target population, your organization, its people, and its social or financial performance. A vision statement that reflects diversity and inclusion will include these principles in at least two of the parameters covered in the statement.

This vision statement from the American Red Cross reflects their commitment to inclusion on multiple fronts:

The American Red Cross empowers people in America to perform extraordinary acts in the face of emergencies and disasters. To ensure full benefit of this experience by all, we deliver our products and services in a culturally sensitive and appropriate manner to all we serve. We fully embrace and promote inclusion across our people, products, and services, and we integrate diversity into our business strategies and decisions.

## Value Statement

Values reflect your organization's deepest beliefs. They are nonnegotiable. Simply put, they are how you identify and differentiate yourself from others.

Values should be embodied in specific behaviors that the organization identifies and institutionalizes at all levels. As you will hear throughout this issue of *TD at Work*, if a leader does not exemplify the values of workplace inclusion, it is quite difficult for those values to be passed on to the employees.

This value statement from Norton Rose Fulbright reflects the organization's commitment to diversity and inclusion:

A diverse workforce is essential to enabling us to achieve our business objectives. Diversity gives us a competitive advantage by expanding and developing

our pool of talent on which we can draw. Growth depends on our ability to attract the best workforce and foster, support, and retain members. We work in diverse markets and with diverse clients, and a workforce that is representative of our clients enables us to better understand business needs. ... Our diversity policy applies to all our employees and partners. It covers all aspects of employment including recruitment and selection, training and development, performance evaluations, compensation and promotion, terms and conditions of employment, and termination. Decisions relating to any aspect of employment must be based solely on ability and performance.

## Possible Scenarios

Once diversity and inclusion have been defined as a fundamental part of an organization's strategic guidelines, you can create scenarios targeting those people you want to work with or focus on.

Here are three examples of approaches to help you build your strategy:

- The traditional SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) can help you analyze how internal and external forces might interact with your mission, vision, and values.
- In a scenario analysis, studies by trend experts or focus groups enable you to

## WHAT AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT LOOKS LIKE

On the website for Ontario Public Service's strategic plan for diversity, Shamira Madhany, chief officer of diversity and accessibility, notes that "an inclusive OPS goes beyond mandatory and legislative requirements: It is a workplace enriched by personal differences, enhanced by the innovation and creativity of an engaged workforce, and widely recognized not just as an employer of choice, but of first choice."

A study by Brent Lyons, Jennifer Wessel, Sonia Ghumman, Anne Marie Ryan, and Sooyeol Kim found higher rates of satisfaction among employees who felt they could talk openly about their religious beliefs at work because their workplaces were generally supportive of diverse opinions and beliefs.

The Health Nexus guide *How To Be a Family Friendly Workplace* states that "policies set the tone of the workplace. They are a means of keeping in place important programs that reflect workplace values. ... Involve workers in policy development whenever possible. Those most directly affected by the policy must buy into it for it to be effective."

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