

Employer Best Practices For Diversity, Equity And Inclusion

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Many employers faced a call for action last year to clearly state their positions on the social justice and civil rights issues of the day.

The days of employers comfortably remaining silent appear to be gone as employees are poised to take employers to task because of their silence, or even to change employers based on their disagreement with their employer's position on an issue.

This has left many employers wondering how best to respond.

For some, it is particularly difficult to know where to start as this may feel like the first time they have been asked to do so, and they may be ill-prepared, though well-intentioned.

There are many best, or even good, practices for cultivating a workplace that promotes a culture of diversity, equity and inclusion and supports employers' overall business objectives.

Ideally, getting diversity, equity and inclusion right this year is a priority for every employer, though what that might look like will likely vary. For many employers, considering the following questions will help:

- Where are we now? What diversity, equity and inclusion metrics do we currently collect and what are they telling us?
- What are our goals and how will we hold ourselves accountable? Where will we memorialize our goals, e.g., a diversity, equity and inclusion action plan?
- Do we want to be an employer-of-choice for diversity, equity and inclusion issues or are we satisfied to simply stay out of the news and off social media in terms of negative press?
- Based on our goals, what internal and external resources will we need?



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- Which leaders will drive our diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives?
- If a public statement needs to be made, who will make it? If a statement needs to be made internally, who will make it?
- Do our current leaders have the skillset necessary to speak competently on diversity, equity and inclusion issues?
- What is our baseline knowledge across the enterprise? Is there training that should occur? How will this occur and who will participate?
- Should we have a diversity, equity and inclusion committee and/or affinity or employee resource groups?

Necessary Core Components for a Strong Program

Employers looking to implement successful diversity, equity and inclusion programs this year would do well to keep in mind the following components:

Consider training all employees, not just leaders and managers.

Some states may have certain training requirements for anti-discrimination training. However, consider whether such trainings are sufficiently robust to meet any diversity, equity and inclusion goals.

For example, a typical training may include an overview of internal policies, relevant employment laws and appropriate workplace behavior.

The reality is that a workplace in 2021 may need training to cover implicit bias, microaggressions and the bystander conundrum. Further, the most successful training programs often utilize a live and/or interactive element and involve or even feature senior leaders.

Consider conducting a diversity, equity and inclusion audit or needs assessment and include senior leaders.

Assessments for diversity, equity and inclusion will allow for a better understanding of what is in place and whether it is working, in addition to helping to shape any goals for the future.

To the extent that the diversity, equity and inclusion program is being driven by someone other than the CEO, consider how the CEO and any other relevant senior leaders will show up.

Ideally, all senior leaders will publicly and frequently express support for the program in word and in deed.

Retention, metrics and employee engagement are crucial components.

Consider looking at retention just as closely as hiring. Looking at hiring is critical; however, without assessing retention and looking for trends, the metrics around hiring may be more challenging to analyze.

Consider reporting key metrics, initiatives and trends periodically to the board of directors. Any director would be well-served to keep a keen eye on diversity, equity and inclusion issues in 2021, as such issues could affect 2021 performance.

Consider whether a diversity, equity and inclusion committee would best support business initiatives related to these issues.

If it would be helpful, then subsequent considerations will include which employees to include, which leaders to include, what metrics will be shared with the committee, what the ground rules will be for discussions, and how best to track progress, among many other factors.

Consider whether affinity or employee resource groups would support diversity, equity and inclusion goals.

Such groups often include members who are linked by a common social identity, life experience or characteristic, such as race, gender, age or sexual identity.

An employer may create these groups to provide support for its employees and to help promote mentoring and networking opportunities for its employees, which can help increase employee satisfaction and support recruitment and retention of diverse employees.

Conclusion

Getting diversity, equity and inclusion right in 2021 is achievable, and employers that engage and involve employees across different levels and departments — while keeping in mind the considerations outlined above — will be ahead of the curve.

A notable key to a successful diversity, equity and inclusion program will be crafting a sustainable strategy and being able to pivot to avoid having employees see diversity, equity and inclusion as a check-the-box exercise.

Another will be positioning all leaders to meet and even exceed expectations for diversity, equity and inclusion.

This will necessitate that leadership hiring processes include evaluating competency and track records in terms of diversity, equity and inclusion, just as a hiring process would review a leader's ability to analyze a profit and loss statement or to craft a viable solution to revitalize a failing project.

Those employers that master hiring competent leaders across their organizations will have a head start and may even find that they have fewer workplace investigations and/or employment discrimination claims as a result.

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