

See Me: The Case for DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION and BELONGING

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As HR professionals, we gather facts all the time. But we need to look deeper and within ourselves because we can't see the whole view if we don't understand our own biases. We all have unconscious biases, and it can be hard to see them. Sometimes it takes others to point them out.

People want four things: to be seen, heard, valued, and safe. If these four things aren't fulfilled – they give less.

We need to **see ourselves**. And we need to **see our companies**.

As HR professionals, we solve problems. We are expected to make things work out, and clear things out of the way for business. We do this authentically, or we don't sleep at night. This can make it very hard to be objective and to see our companies as our employees do. It takes a lot of humility and courage to look at everything you've always done the way you've always done it, and ask "Did I build something biased? Did I build something good for business and bad for people?" These are really tough questions.

Even with the best of intentions, we can see what we want to see – informed by our own biases. For this reason, I suggest asking someone else to do it or at least checking your work.

That's what we did at Worldwide Clinical Trials. We hired an independent DEIB consultant to look at everything we do: policies, procedures, turnover data, exit data, hiring data, pay data, etc. We asked this consultant to tell us what we don't know – what we can't see – about our company.

Here is a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging (DEI&B) framework that you might consider in your organization, based on what we learned and what we use:

Phase one: Do a comprehensive summary report

The baseline is to get to the facts through:

- inclusion and belonging surveys
- listening focus groups
- organizational assessment.

Phase two: Do the groundwork

Get to the core and build the infrastructure you are lacking, e.g.:

- create a Code of Conduct
- build a global ethics line

- partner with experts to guide you
- foster executive engagement.

Phase three: Employee engagement

This comes after all the previous phases are in place and this is the part that employees really want.

While the DEIB consultant analyzed our situation at Worldwide Clinical Trials, we worked to cultivate executive engagement. We needed a common language and understanding that our management team is diverse – everyone has their own story. We learned about history and systems that create inequalities. That really humbled the team. It enabled us to be more open and curious. That openness fed **a growth mindset** – an understanding that, while we will make mistakes and we will be imperfect in this work, we know we all have shared values and commitment.

As we were finalizing the executive engagement, the results came in:

- 92% of our employees across the most vulnerable categories felt that they belonged.
- 96% said we are inclusive regarding race.
- 97% said we are inclusive of sexual orientation.
- 97% said we are inclusive of religious preferences.

We also learned some uncomfortable truths that needed to be addressed. Results told us that employees felt our performance standards are inconsistent, and there is disconnection and lack of unity. We learned from our exit interviews that employees want more career development and that some people's opinions aren't valued, and they are afraid to voice them. These results became the top priorities for our leadership team, our People, Strategy, & Culture team, and our Diversity Council – with each team holding the others accountable.

We created a Diversity Council, to build goals, actions, and accountability. Dozens of employees were **interviewed to learn what diversity means to them** and why they

want to be in the Council. They shared very personal topics related to women's rights (*People comment on my hair and it's offensive*), LGBTQI+ (*I don't tell people I'm gay*), and various other topics. The impact of aloneness when hiding yourself is profound. When that exists, you can't possibly belong. In this case, belonging is both the risk and the reward.

It's a delicate balance. When there's balance, people engage. When there's no balance, they leave, because **all humans need to be seen, heard, valued, and safe. And when they're not, they give less.** Let's stay really curious about these humans who happen to lend their time and talents and resources to our companies. We're learning things about them and about work that we've never known before.

The social contract with workers is changing.

We're in the midst of a great transformation, a big one, the biggest shift of our careers. There's a shift in power, priorities, and options for workers. Some are calling it the "great resignation." I prefer to think of it as a great wake-up call.

2020 was a seismic shift in our policies. We learned a lot about our capacities and limits. Globally, we saw and are still seeing social unrest, protests, health equity disparities, and wealth gaps right in front of our faces. No part of the planet is exempt from people **begging to be seen.**

Workers have always changed for companies. Now it's time for companies to change for workers.

People want four things: to be seen, heard, valued, and safe. If these four things aren't fulfilled – they give less. We need to see ourselves. And we need to see our companies.