

Top tips for inclusive leadership

Recognise that Inclusion goes beyond gender, race and sexuality - it includes behavioural characteristics, socio-economic background and neurodiversity – for example extroverts having an understanding of introverts. Create an environment where people are able to be fully open about themselves, for example by hosting events around Pride, International Women's Day and marking religious holidays.

Have diversity and inclusion as part of your firm's mission statement - repeat this mission statement often until each member of the firm appreciates its importance to the firm and its culture. The leadership team must support and embrace this statement in their actions, so that members of the firm know who to talk to about barriers to inclusivity and how the leadership will react.

Create a culture where leadership does not just come from the top - where individuals at all levels lead by example and feel supported to do so. Everyone can be a leader - sometimes juniors are best placed to challenge the status quo and introduce fresh thinking and ideas. Reverse mentoring can help with this and you can start by sending a survey to match mentors/mentees accordingly.

Listen to the employee voice - to understand what barriers to inclusivity members of the organisation are experiencing or have experienced. Hold workshops, group meetings, individual conversations and surveys, as well as encouraging an open door policy, so the team can approach leaders informally, at any time too. Explain to the leadership team that not addressing these barriers will be, at best, an opportunity missed to improve retention of talent. Challenge the leadership team to "hear the criticism" and address it pro-actively. Consider a "drop box" for suggestions.

Embrace individuality - at every level of the organisation and the recognise the benefit different perspectives can bring by specific training (such as unconscious bias sessions) and also by encouraging leaders and team members to be open about what makes them individual. Have awareness of your own bias towards similarity and difference. This is especially true as it relates to selection, appraisal and promotion.

Create a psychologically safe environment - meaning a safe space for the team to share personal experiences and to learn from each other, with high levels of trust. Give everyone a voice and listen to others.

Try to ensure you run inclusive meetings - for example, you could ask junior members of the team to speak first in meetings, so that they might offer new perspectives and ideas, rather than deferring to the comments and approaches of leadership. You could identify members of your team who are less likely to speak up in a meeting (perhaps because they are introverted or feel too junior), recognise their contribution is valuable and encourage them to participate fully.

Call out non-inclusive behaviours - think about how to do this appropriately. For example follow up privately after the event and ask the question, "do you realise how you made X feel?", or take action at the time, by making efforts to specifically include the person who is being overlooked. Most people are grateful to have behaviours pointed out to them, as they may not have been aware of the issue. If the person does not accept being called out, perhaps it is a broader training issue, or evidence of a systemic problem.

Recruitment – when you are in a sector with a limited recruitment pool to draw from, seek to challenge received wisdom. For example ask whether apprenticeships might work, require recruiters to send you a diverse list of candidates, or contact industry groups that have a focus on diversity and ask for their advice. Work alongside local schools or charitable organisations to raise awareness of your field of practice and of the range of roles your organisation includes (for example in almost all businesses beyond the visible roles such as a lawyer or asset manager, there are equally essential roles in marketing, IT, accounting etc).

Be the change you want to see in your organisation – a small group of people (in leadership, non-leadership or a mixture of both) with a common idea/cause can work to improve the culture of an organisation.