



Influencing DE&I Strategies: Tips for Emerging Professionals

By Kathy Gurchiek
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There has been increased focus on establishing diverse, equitable and inclusive workplaces. However, fewer than one-fourth of employers in the U.S. offer team-building exercises on diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I), and only slightly more than one-fourth offer employee affinity groups and programs with a DE&I focus, according to an update of the Society for Human Resource Management's (SHRM's) Together Forward @Work research (https://prodtfw.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/20-1412_TFAW_Report_FNL_Pages_V2.pdf) conducted this summer.

So how can HR professionals—especially young workers and emerging professionals—communicate the importance of DE&I strategies to their leaders?

It's a matter of knowing how to "manage up," according to Mary Abbajay. She is the author of *Managing Up: How to Move Up, Win at Work, and Succeed with Any Type of Boss* (Wiley, 2018) and president of Careerstone Group, a Washington, D.C.-based consultancy.

"Managing up' is about managing our relationships with those above us in an organization," she told *SHRM Online*. "It is about consciously and deliberately developing and maintaining a robust, productive and positive relationship with others so that we can succeed, they can succeed and the organization can succeed. It is about using adaptive relationship management strategies to work well with people who have different power levels, perspectives and personalities."

Some adaptive relationship management strategies she suggested new professionals can use to figure out your bosses' needs, wants and priorities:

- Learn their boss's work style. Pay attention to how your leaders operate—their preferences, personalities, priorities and pet peeves. How do they like to communicate?
- Identify their own work style. How do you like to get work done?
- Assess the ways they are similar to and different from their boss and what they could do more or less of—or differently—in order to work well with their boss.

"We can't control or change how other people operate. We only have control over the way we choose to interact with others," Abbajay said. "Our power lies in our ability to flex and adapt. It's about choosing when and how to adapt to others."

Be an Ally

Becoming an organizational ally is one of the best ways emerging professionals can advance DE&I strategies, she said.

"An ally is someone who is not a member of a marginalized group, but who supports inclusion through stated values and positive action for everyone's benefit,"

Abbajay said. Ways to do this, she suggested, include the following:

- Champion and amplify the ideas of other people by actively seeking contributions during meetings and making sure ideas from a diverse group of colleagues are heard and supported.
- Identify and enact small acts of inclusion. When working or starting a project, for example, ask yourself how it can be made more inclusive. Who has not been invited to a meeting, and how could the project benefit from other points of view?
- Make an effort to get to know all your colleagues professionally and personally. Making friends at work, Abbajay said, sends a powerful message to others about inclusion and status.

Here are some additional discussion points and actions HR can raise with leaders to make their organizations more diverse, equitable and inclusive.

Make the Case for Recruitment

Ninety percent of members of Generation Z—those born in 1997 through 2012, the oldest of whom turn 23 this year—are more likely to apply to a job if the organization reflects a diverse workplace (<https://tallo.com/blog/genz-demands-diversity-inclusion-strategy/>), according to a recent survey by Tallo, a youth-focused

alternative to LinkedIn. The online and mobile survey was conducted with 5,063 U.S. high school and college-age students in September. Among the findings:

- 32 percent of respondents said they decided not to apply for a job because they feared being discriminated against because of their race, ethnicity or gender identity.
- 67 percent have witnessed discrimination at work based on someone's race, ethnicity, gender identity or sexual orientation. A high percentage of what they witnessed or experienced happened in school.
- 88 percent agreed it is important that recruiters or potential employers ask people about their preferred gender pronouns. However, only 18 percent of respondents have ever had a conversation with a recruiter or a potential employer who asked about their preferred gender pronouns.

[*SHRM members-only toolkit: Introduction to the Human Resources Discipline of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion* (www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/toolkits/pages/introdiversity.aspx?_ga=2.48193063.1090771304.1604264868-1296205769.1578683579)]

"If you're in the business of recruiting Gen Z, you need a diversity and inclusion strategy and you need it now," Tallo's CEO and co-founder, Casey Welch, said in a news release highlighting the findings.

"Job seekers have stressed the significance of diversity and inclusion for decades, but Generation Z could be the generation that really forces employers to take this issue—along with timely responses to social issues and COVID-19—more seriously than they ever have before."

Recruitment and hiring strategies should include the following practices, according to Salwa Rahim-Dillard, founder of Equision Consulting in the greater Chicago area:

- Using standardized talent acquisition practices.
- Requiring at least two Black and brown candidates on the job interview slate.
- Using structured interview guides and a diverse panel of interviewers.

Provide Training and Development

Developing a diverse and inclusive workforce also should include the following, Rahim-Dillard said:

- Giving fair and frequent high-quality feedback to Black and brown colleagues.
- Challenging unsubstantiated feedback during talent reviews.
- Conducting engagement surveys of Black and brown employees.
- Asking for an annual audit of pay equity, performance ratings, and voluntary and involuntary exits.
- Asking about succession planning and the promotion of Black and brown employees.
- Making sure people of color are not overlooked for high-visibility projects, mentoring and sponsorship programs.

Noted Michelle Mikesell, corporate HR vice president at G&A Partners in Humble, Texas, "Just watching how quickly everything has changed in business and in the world today illustrates the importance of education, which is more critical than ever.

"Train supervisors on their responsibilities to refrain from discriminatory behavior and harassment, and teach them how to respond to it if they discover an employee is harassing or bullying another. It doesn't matter if it's one of your star performers [who] violates the policy; hold them accountable."

[*Visit SHRM's resource page on overcoming workplace bias* (www.shrm.org/ResourcesAndTools/Pages/overcoming-workplace-bias.aspx).]

Other SHRM Resources:

The Journey to Equity and Inclusion (https://togetherforwardatwork.shrm.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/20-1412_TFAW_Report_FNL_Pages_V2.pdf), SHRM research report, Summer 2020

Data Can Help Create Fairer Workplaces (www.shrm.org/ResourcesAndTools/hr-topics/compensation/Pages/data-can-help-create-fairer-workplaces.aspx), *SHRM Online*, October 2020

SHRM's INCLUSION 2020: Breaking Down Hiring Barriers (www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/talent-acquisition/pages/shrm-inclusion-2020-breaking-down-hiring-barriers.aspx), *SHRM Online*, October 2020

Career Compass (<https://www.buzzsprout.com/853243/5067266-spotlighting-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-with-special-guest-camille-chang-gilmore>), SHRM and SHRM Foundation podcast, August 2020

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