



## 5 Steps to Inclusive Leadership

*Courtesy of Her New Standard*

### Identify Your Personal Biases

The first step to becoming a more inclusive leader is cultivating awareness of your own biases. Bias comes from a primitive part of our brain that fears difference. As such, none of us are immune to biases and it's only by recognizing them that we can correct for them. It's time to pull out the magnifying glass and examine your biases as well as those built into the culture, policies and procedures of your organization. To begin identifying your blind spots, consider taking this Implicit Association Test designed by Harvard researchers to test your biases and provide feedback on where your vulnerabilities are and how they may impact your decision-making. You may also find it helpful to enlist the support of a group of trusted advisers who will give you candid feedback about behaviors that may be inhibiting inclusion.

### Declare Your Commitment to Inclusion and Take Imperfect Action

Be vocal about your commitment to leveraging diverse perspectives and back it up by devoting time, energy and resources to creating a more inclusive workplace. Make sure that underrepresented and marginalized individuals have exposure to the opportunities, relationships and resources that are critical to advancement and be willing to advocate on their behalf. You may feel uncomfortable challenging the status quo when you have to call someone out for saying something insensitive or offensive, but don't let your fear of discomfort stop you from taking action. When you hold yourself and those around you accountable, you give others permission to do the same and create an environment where it feels safe to speak up.

One way to demonstrate your commitment to change and encourage others to become involved is to have each person on your team identify one thing that they can do differently to foster a more inclusive workplace. Then carve out time in your weekly meetings to discuss progress, including any missteps or learning experiences. This takes a topic that often feels daunting and abstract and makes it concrete, encouraging everyone to take personal responsibility and create an open dialogue.

### Lead With Humility and Show Vulnerability

In order for your inclusion efforts to be truly effective, you must set your ego aside and be willing to show vulnerability. Research from Harvard Business Review found that when awareness of bias is combined with high levels of humility, it can increase feelings of inclusion by up to 25%.

Take ownership of your mistakes, don't be afraid to admit that you're still learning and ask employees for candid feedback on how you can improve. When team members share their feedback, listen with an open mind and without judgment. It can be natural to feel defensive when receiving criticism but refrain from the urge to comment and instead ask meaningful, clarifying questions. Then commit to making a change and openly share your progress. Inclusion is a journey, not a destination so remember that this will become an on-going cycle of feedback and implementation. As team members see you continually take action based on their feedback, they will feel their opinions are valued and trust that you are committed to change — even if you don't get it perfect 100% of the time!

## **Seek Out Diverse Perspectives**

No matter how much time you've spent looking inward to identify your biases, you can't truly be an inclusive leader without seeking out diverse perspectives and taking the time to understand the unique experiences and perceptions of the many different individuals within your organization.

Engage in conversations with employees around biases, discrimination and barriers. When a team member is discussing an issue, don't immediately go into problem-solving mode. Instead, increase your understanding by asking meaningful follow-up questions and affirm their experience. Then set a time for a follow-up discussion and involve the individual in the problem-solving process. To facilitate these conversations and tap into insights from diverse perspectives, consider holding focus groups or office hours.

If you suspect individuals from underrepresented or marginalized groups in your organization may fear backlash for sharing their honest opinions, you may also want to consider giving employees an anonymous way to share their thoughts with you, such as a survey. Giving people a channel to share their feedback without fear of consequences shows how much you truly care and are committed to creating a safe, inclusive environment for all voices to be heard.

## **Create a Safe Environment for Effective Collaboration**

A study by N. J. Adler revealed that without inclusion, diversity has a high chance of becoming chaotic, leading to lower productivity and engagement, higher turnover and litigation. When you focus on diversity while neglecting inclusion, you risk making underrepresented groups feel like they're just present to check a box or fulfill a quota. As a result, they may feel more pressure to conform to organizational norms and values so as not to stand out, rather than sharing their unique perspective.

Inclusive leaders understand that for collaboration to be successful, team members must first be willing to share their perspectives. As a leader, it's your job to create an environment in which all individuals feel empowered to express their opinions freely with the group. Pay close attention to whose perspectives are missing from discussions and make consistent efforts to include them.

If you're ready to be a more inclusive leader, we challenge you to commit to action right now and create a plan for moving forward. Write down your answers to the following questions:

- How will you develop awareness of your own biases?
- What processes, policies or structures can you put in place to limit the detrimental effects of bias and enhance inclusion efforts?
- How will you demonstrate your commitment to diversity and inclusion?
- How can you create an environment of psychological safety and ensure that all perspectives are being heard and valued?
- How will you measure your success?

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