

Appreciating Difference

Recently, an intense focus has been placed on the importance of diversity and inclusion in the workplace, but this concept isn't new, and neither are its challenges. On one level as a manager, you have a responsibility to promote inclusivity among your employees and encourage them to respect and appreciate each other's differences. On the other, you have the added layer of assembling and managing a diverse group of employees while keeping personal biases in check in order to effectively do so. This can be difficult, as personal beliefs and preconceptions often interfere with decision-making, whether you realize it or not.

Benefits of a Diverse Workforce:

- Improved productivity
- Greater psychological safety
- Increased creativity
- Better communication
- More effective collaboration
- Higher employee retention
- Increased employee satisfaction

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Diverse and inclusive

What does diversity and inclusion look like in the workplace? In general, *diversity* is often used to describe a group of individuals ranging in gender, age, and social, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. In the workplace, the meaning may expand to include, for example, skill set, introversion/extroversion, military experience, subject matter expertise, tenure, and communication and work style.

Inclusion, in the workplace capacity, refers to an environment where each person in a group—regardless of what makes them diverse—is treated equally and respectfully, has the same access to resources and opportunities, and feels safe to share ideas and opinions with the overall group.

Beware of biases

To make good hiring and management decisions, and to foster a culture that values diversity, you must be able to rein in personal biases. This starts with acknowledging that you have them—we all do—and being able to set them aside in the moment. Some examples of biased behavior include focusing on one positive or negative aspect of an individual (such as the university they attended or a nervous tick they have) at the exclusion of all other aspects; or opting to use or interpret information from an article that supports a pre-existing belief of yours, despite the facts presented by a more credible source.

Even the field

Here are some ways to consciously set aside beliefs and biases in favor of more diversity and inclusion:

Compare your instincts against the facts. Going with your gut isn't always best. It's easier to recall information that we agree with, but that doesn't mean it's correct. Research the facts before settling on an answer.

Consider all outcomes (the good and the bad). Ditch the rose-colored glasses when making big decisions and be honest with yourself about the potential effects. Whether you're choosing where to commit funds or choosing whom to hire, consider the positives and negatives of each option.

Get a fresh set of eyes. On occasion, we can get emotionally invested in something to the point that we're no longer able to see the bigger picture. Expand your viewpoint by asking for input from someone who is completely removed from the situation.

Encourage employee input. Invite employee input when developing a new policy or procedure, or when revising old ones. In addition to engendering some good ideas, it will also help with employee buy-in when those policies and procedures are put in place.

If you're happy and you know it, stop and think. Feeling good about a decision is great. But feeling *too* good may be a red flag. Are you happy because you got what you wanted, or because you feel confident you made the best choice for your team?

Step back and reflect. In any scenario, it's a good idea to take a moment to think through everything once or twice. Don't let time limits or other sources of pressure inhibit your thought process or force you into making a big decision before you're sure it's the right one.

For more information on how to foster workplace diversity and inclusion, or if you'd like additional recommendations for curbing unconscious biases, call your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Licensed counselors are available 24 hours a day to provide support, helpful resources, and expert guidance whenever you need it.

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a voluntary and confidential employee benefit available to eligible federal employees at no cost.

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