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## **4 Ways to Promote Authentic DE&I Practices**

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There is no question that the increased focus on diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) in the workplace is a positive. Younger generations are demanding more from employers and want them to better reflect the society in which they operate. Companies are responding by adopting policies with plenty of words promising meaningful change.

But how much of this talk about DE&I is just that—talk? Despite all the research showing how valuable increasing diversity, equity and inclusion is to strengthening an organization, how many companies are simply going through the motions on DE&I without actually stopping and reflecting on what's wrong, what needs to change and how they should change?

So far, the majority of those in the HR industry and beyond aren't quite buying what companies are preaching. Last year, a [Yoh survey](#) of nearly 1,000 American workers found that while 30 percent say their company acknowledges important dates related to race, ethnicity or gender (e.g., Black History Month and Women's History Month), their employer doesn't take any

specific actions to advocate for the groups being recognized. Worse still, more than one-fifth of workers say their company talks about improving DE&I in the workplace but does not follow through with action.

Another [survey](#) by the Josh Bersin Company found that about 80 percent of companies are just going through the motions on DE&I and aren't holding themselves accountable.

In many ways, DE&I is about being authentic. It's not a "fake it till you make it" initiative. Efforts must be real, and they must be deliberate. They need to be actionable and measurable. But, as the data reveals, that's easier said than done.

So how can organizations and their HR leaders promote authentic DE&I practices in the workplace that go beyond words and spur action that creates change? Here are four ways—and as usual, the work starts at the top.

### 1. Commit to DE&I from the Top Down (in a Tangible and Measurable Way)

The culture of most companies reflects the personality and values (and look) of their leaders. If those at the head of an organization do not commit to improving DE&I and show it through their words and organizational decisions, any plans set forth will immediately fall flat.

For DE&I efforts to work, they must be measurable, and leaders must be held accountable to their success or failure. It all begins with intention. What do leaders hope to achieve by adopting DE&I initiatives? Is it just about checking a box so the company can add a two-paragraph commitment to its website? Or does the organization really see the need for greater diversity and how it can improve both the company's bottom line and skill bank?

When data from McKinsey & Company shows that businesses with more racially and ethnically diverse workforces are 35 percent more likely to financially outperform industry medians, failing to enact DE&I practices isn't just unethical. It's almost financial malpractice.

The success or failure of DE&I efforts depends on how much those at the top are willing to do to improve workplace diversity. Further, leaders must be willing to bring in or promote more leaders from diverse backgrounds to join their ranks. Otherwise, the rest of the organization will have a hard time believing any commitments to diversity are truly authentic.

### 2. Make DE&I a Key Part of a Company's Core Values

Dedicating a section of a company's website and handbook to talk about its DE&I efforts is a nice step. But when they're separated from the mission or core values that the company lives by, are DE&I promises that important to a company's vision?

DE&I initiatives should be as much a part of a company's values as any other promises. It's not a marketing campaign or a way to enhance social media presence. This should be a specified commitment and core component of what drives an organization forward. Defining DE&I and adding it to a company's set of core values also makes the entire organization more accountable to it.

### 3. Examine Company Culture for Signs of Bias with 8 Questions

Organizations cannot hope that by recruiting more candidates from diverse groups, their presence alone will fix what needs to be addressed in the company's culture in the first place. Repairs must be made to the foundation before any additions are made.

DE&I has three core components, and all three must be embraced to truly change cultures for the better. Building out a more *diverse* team without creating a more *equitable* workplace beforehand and having practices and policies in place to ensure these new additions will truly be *included* isn't really a recipe for success. It's wasted effort and often leads to even higher turnover and questions about what went wrong.

Start by asking and answering the following questions:

1. Is our company's leadership modeling inclusive behavior? If not, what support do they need?
2. How can our workplace benefit from increased diversity and inclusion?
3. Why haven't we successfully increased diversity on our teams so far?
4. Why aren't we finding more candidates from diverse backgrounds during the hiring process?
5. For what reasons have we passed on or disqualified such candidates in the past?
6. Where are we looking for candidates?
7. Are our policies and practices—remote/flexible work, benefit eligibility, promotion criteria, dress codes, etc.—excluding people unnecessarily?
8. If we primarily hire entry-level employees from among our interns, are our practices (e.g., offering only unpaid internships) unintentionally disqualifying would-be candidates?

If you don't first understand the current situation and how making changes can enhance culture and results, even the best, most well-intentioned plans will have a hard time taking root.

### 4. Require Candor

Strong leaders work to recognize their blind spots. Even as workplaces have become more open, there is often a limit on what workers will say to their bosses (or those at the top). Individuals

who are victims of workplace bias will rarely speak up about it. Whether it's for fear of losing a job or being punished, most people will not criticize or speak candidly about issues they have with a company, especially if they're someone from a diverse background speaking about issues with DE&I.

For DE&I efforts to work, there must be candor from across the company. In many cases, guaranteeing anonymity is a helpful way of gaining more honest feedback. Beyond gauging workplace sentiment with quarterly surveys, companies should have an open, anonymous communications channel where people can provide feedback at any time. This ensures that workers don't need to wait until something bad happens to feel comfortable speaking up about it.

Haphazardly and disingenuously addressing DE&I not only won't create the positive change that companies seek, but could also lead to resentment and negative change. Being honest about the limitations of the status quo and making everyone accountable for bringing to life necessary DE&I transformations can lead to more authentic, more successful improvements.

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