

The critical role all managers play in workplace diversity



Achieving a diverse workplace should be the priority of all companies, but research by Accenture indicates that leaders may not be as successful in promoting a fair culture as they think: Though 68% of leaders surveyed said they created empowering environments for their employees, just 36% of employees said the same. The reality is, managers play a critical role in ensuring that a high-level corporate concept of workplace diversity comes to life in a way that all employees can feel, sense and embrace in their professional lives.

Here are a few ways managers can ensure they're promoting workplace diversity, and actively working to eliminate possible biases that hinder it.

Actively look for signs of bias

Experts at *Harvard Business Review* say that all managers have an opportunity to become anti-bias advocates, simply by keeping an eye out for the subtle ways inequity can creep into the workplace. Keep an eye out for these signs:

- Groups of employees or individuals must prove themselves to be “heard” or viewed to be as valuable as other contributors
- Groups of employees have been asked to change their appearance to conform to company norms, or must adhere to a narrower range of behaviors compared to others to be acknowledged equally or promoted
- Groups in the company compete against one another because of contradicting strategies for self-expression or identity.

Regardless of whether a company has an ongoing commitment to diversity training to reduce unconscious bias, managers can play a key role in staying aware of these possible scenarios, and as importantly, being vigilant in eliminating them.

For example, the creation of mentorship programs that promote diversity and a commitment to ensuring level diversity among people who regularly work side-by-side can be highly effective strategies in ensuring that workplace diversity is part of a company's working culture, according to management experts at the University of Pennsylvania.

Demand a diverse candidate pool

Managers can work with human resources and recruiting teams to insist that a diverse pool of candidates are presented for open roles, regardless of race or gender, whenever there is a hiring opportunity.

According to *HBR*, simply having a more diverse candidate pool greatly influences whether a company will have a diverse workforce. It cites data indicating that the odds of hiring a non-white candidate are substantially

greater when there are at least two minority applicants in the final selection pool.

Managers can also influence diversity by actively removing bias in job descriptions and the hiring process. Before anyone interviews a candidate, establish and agree upon the shared criterion each interviewer feels would be necessary for the candidate to be “excellent” in the role. Then establish a standard rubric that each interviewer will use to evaluate each applicant.

Don't ignore the elephant in the room

Every manager and employee knows equality is a critical societal issue, and it's regularly covered in the media. Instead of ignoring that reality and pretending that events involving race and gender aren't happening in the world, use them as opportunities to foster open, honest and respectful conversations among teams so they can band together in the name of shared improvements.

Establish an ongoing cadence of meetings designed to give everyone on the team an opportunity to speak freely and openly about their experiences and perceptions with diversity in the world at large, and in their personal and professional lives.

Encourage all team members to share, listen and ask questions. That can expose inequalities that some team members may not even notice because it's not part of their personal reality. Close each meeting by inviting every member of the team to share ideas about how to address and adapt processes and communication styles in the workplace to create a more harmonious and inclusive environment for everyone.