

## Inclusive Leadership: *Three Actions for Successful Leaders*

The jury is in: inclusive leadership is successful leadership. According to a recent Kincannon & Reed survey, food and agriculture industry executives indicated that critical leadership characteristics in executive recruitment and engagement include emotional intelligence (74%) and diversity, equity and inclusion (77%).

The growing interest in diversity expectations from employees, customers, and shareholders is well-founded: companies that prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) generate 45% more revenue from innovation than those with below-average diversity.

The case for inclusivity is formidable, but so is the challenge of getting started. The majority of diversity is under the surface, and unique

differentiators like values, preferences, and background are harder to identify than gender, ethnicity or age. Understanding the needs of each team member requires a different mindset and approach.

To build a successful culture based on inclusion, we've identified the steps in three key areas that the inclusive leader must take.

**Diversity:** The presence of differences in people's backgrounds, experiences, identities, and perspectives.

**Equity:** Recognition that each person has different circumstances and allocating the exact resources, support, and opportunities needed for everyone to reach the same outcome.

**Inclusion:** Creating a culture where everyone feels they belong, are valued and respected, and are able to contribute their unique perspectives and talents without judgment.

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## Step One: Self-Reflection

First, understand yourself. Self-reflection provides an inner compass that helps identify where you are and points toward growth. We've seen great examples of inclusive leaders in our interactions with executives and have noticed some similar traits among the best. [Research](#) from Harvard Business Review confirms these traits distinguishing inclusive leaders from others:

- 1 VISIBLE COMMITMENT:** They articulate an authentic commitment to diversity, challenge the status quo, hold others accountable, and make diversity and inclusion a personal priority.
- 2 HUMILITY:** They are modest about their capabilities, admit mistakes, and create space for others to contribute.
- 3 AWARENESS OF BIAS:** They show awareness of personal blind spots and flaws in the system and work hard to ensure a meritocracy.
- 4 CURIOSITY ABOUT OTHERS:** They demonstrate an open mindset and deep curiosity about others, listen without judgment, and empathize to understand those around them.
- 5 CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE:** They are attentive to others' cultures and adapt as required.
- 6 EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION:** They empower others, value diverse thinking and psychological safety, and focus on team cohesion.

These specific traits, when practiced, strengthen a leader's emotional intelligence (EQ). The higher the EQ, the better the communication, connection, and emotional navigation – the better the leadership.

When **visibly committed** to diversity and **aware** of other cultures, systemic issues, and their own bias, inclusive leaders better understand how people feel judged, included, and excluded. When **collaborative** and curious, inclusive leaders work to ensure every member of their team is valued, treated with respect, and receives what they need to thrive. When **humble**, inclusive leaders create

a safe environment where trust can be regained after mistakes, and where team well-being and retention increase.

The inclusive leader is no unicorn: anyone can cultivate these traits.

*No matter the starting point, powerful leadership externally begins with deep assessment internally.*

### START WITH THESE THREE STEPS:

#### 1. Ask yourself meaningful questions:

Are all your team members forthcoming, or are some withdrawn? Do you experience communication difficulties? Do you attribute these difficulties to someone's character? There is more diversity within groups than between groups, so the list of reflection questions can be long. Start with a few questions every day to build awareness.

#### 2. Identify areas of growth:

Everyone will have them, but few will look at these areas as opportunities for inclusive leadership. Once you've identified your biases and behavioral patterns, identify how far you need to tip the scales back to fairness and equity.

#### 3. Get support:

Surround yourself with people and resources who will help you uncover blind spots, stay consistent with intentional learning, and celebrate your growth. From personal diverse advisory boards to local resources, make a growth plan that works for you.

Through self-reflection, feedback, and learning, leaders can cultivate foundational traits for inclusive leadership. Uncovering priorities, preferences, and biases allows leaders to build a safe environment where every team member can thrive.

## Step Two: Building an Inclusive Team Culture

However, awareness is not enough. Reflection provides the compass, but team input supplies the map of where everyone is, and how to lead them toward inclusivity. And a thriving, diverse team culture begins with inclusive hiring practices.

Top candidates have many opportunities and little tolerance for unhealthy company culture. Uncovering these biases is essential for attracting and retaining the best. Leverage these steps to uncover biases and ensure inclusion during the hiring process:

1. Prioritize the counsel of an external specialist to both assess and build equitable hiring practices that are built on DE&I principles.
2. Gather and review anonymous feedback from teams to determine whether employees feel current hiring practices are inclusive, pay is fair, the work environment is equitable for all, and that metrics important to your DE&I strategy are included.
3. Work with HR staff and appropriate stakeholders to make improvements where needed on an ongoing basis.

*When your processes are equitable and your culture inclusive, top talent will knock down your doors.*

But what about your current team? Today's convergence of multiple generations in the workplace creates a variety of management preferences, desired development opportunities, and motivations. Baby Boomers prefer talking in person or on the phone. Younger generations prefer texting and planned calls. Boomers value loyalty while Gen X values quality of life, and so on. Leaders who want to create an inclusive culture must understand the differences driving their

diverse and multigenerational workforce for higher retention and performance.

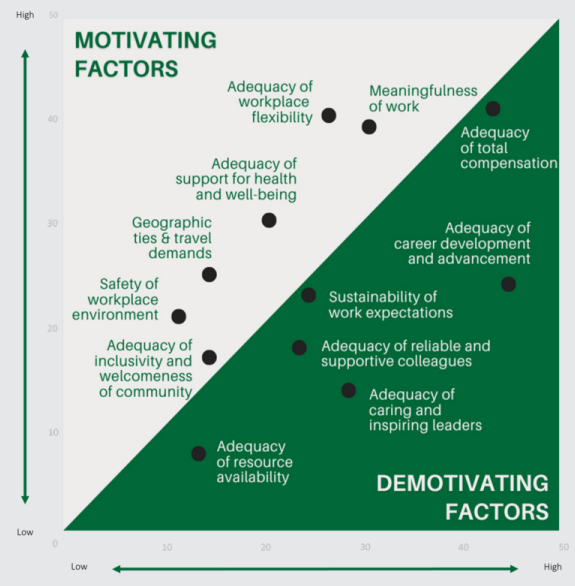
The answers to these questions provide a more complete picture of your team's needs and how you can support them. And leveraging these answers will empower you to create a healthy work culture that attracts and retains leaders.

### TO EXPLORE YOUR TEAM MEMBERS' NEEDS, ASK THESE QUESTIONS:

1. What motivates you?
2. How can I empower you to do your best work?
3. What is your preferred management style?
4. Do you like to be recognized for good work? If yes, how so?
5. What are your overarching career goals?
6. What professional development opportunities would you like to pursue?
7. What diminishes my credibility as a leader?

## Motivating Factors in Attraction & Retention

A report from McKinsey asked what motivates employees to stay or leave an organization. Contributing motivators (and demotivators) include total compensation, meaningful work, workplace flexibility, as well as career development and advancement opportunities. While compensation will always be a factor, less-tangible factors are becoming more highly valued.



## Step Three: Create an Inclusive Company Culture

To become an inclusive leader, you must be able to unify diverse teams towards a common goal and track company progress. Your company values and purpose will be imperative throughout this process. A company's values should be all-encompassing no matter the circumstance.

They should be applied to hiring criteria, daily decision making, and even assessing whether current employees are a good match for your company. To ensure company values are as inspiring as they are instructional, start with a company-wide culture survey that is executed by external consultants. If resources for external partners are unavailable, provide certainty that input shared is kept confidential and not tied to any individual, unless they want it to be attributed.

**Employees feel that purpose is important—but many say their companies don't have one, let alone one that makes a difference.**

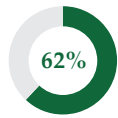
### RESPONDENTS REPORTING THAT...



...it is important to have a purpose



...purpose should receive more weight than profit



...their organizations have a purpose statement



...their organizations' purpose statements drive impact

### Importance of Company Purpose and Employee Impact

A McKinsey [survey](#) of more than 1,200 managers and frontline employees at U.S. companies affirmed the importance of company purpose. Contributing to society and creating meaningful work were noted as the top two employee priorities, but only 42 percent reported that their company's stated "purpose" had much effect.

[Research](#) from Harvard Business Review offers a framework for addressing and strengthening the way your company communicates your vision, mission and values. Your vision should be aspirational and paint a picture of the significant impact for which you are striving. The mission should be an action-oriented statement that describes the daily focus that will turn your vision into reality. And your values should serve as a guidebook or instruction manual for all employees.

### WHEN YOUR VISION, MISSION, AND VALUES ARE SET, THE NEXT STEPS WILL PREPARE YOU FOR FUTURE SUCCESS:

1. Determine metrics that will help you benchmark and measure progress in alignment with your goals and culture. These may include employee and/or departmental satisfaction, promotion and turnover rates, professional development access, organizational structure, and more.
2. Establish and roll out a framework that clearly articulates company vision, mission, values, goals, expectations, and action steps to all employees.
3. Implement new practices and policies that support inclusive values, like flexible work arrangements, pay transparency, and parental leave.
4. Provide ongoing DE&I training and inclusive leadership examples for leaders and managers.
5. Conduct a recurring employee survey to assess progress and make adjustments in alignment with an inclusive company culture.

**NOTE:** Segments displayed in gray reflect respondents who were neutral, disagreed, or strongly disagreed. Impact score, which is based on subset of respondents reporting presence of organizational purpose, derived on basis of responses to questions about achievements of purpose and positive change associated with purpose.

**SOURCE:** McKinsey Organizational Purpose Survey of 1,214 managers and frontline employees at US companies, October 2019

When done well, your values or beliefs will guide employee expectations for decision making, the treatment of colleagues, business partners, and customers.

If you find that your current vision, mission and values aren't reflective of the culture you strive for, either refresh them or start with a clean slate to reimagine your intended future state. You can do this by identifying what is happening in the background when your company is successful. Additionally, you should note the "must haves" and non-negotiables that will prevent you from having an inclusive culture.

Following these steps will ground leadership and provide the tools necessary to build an inclusive culture. By understanding your company's current state, addressing opportunities for growth, and tracking progress, your team will have a North Star that inspires, a DE&I roadmap that sets expectations, and a plan to address areas of misalignment.

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What do you do if you uncover misalignment? Team members who express bias or discriminatory beliefs and behaviors significantly harm company culture and dissuade innovation and retention. Inclusive leaders should openly express zero tolerance for such behaviors and offer training and education.

**TO ESTABLISH AND PRESERVE AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE BUILT ON COMPANY VALUES:**

1. Actively increase the capacity for leaders and managers to identify and address discriminatory or other toxic behaviors.
2. Offer training and education in unconscious bias, cultural competency, microaggressions, and more.
3. Set clear expectations for performance improvement where necessary.

If an employee is clearly misaligned with company values and expectations and does not make swift and drastic improvements in performance and attitude, termination of employment is necessary.

When leaders and managers are equipped to address toxic behaviors and set clear expectations, they build a healthier work environment for all – one that fosters greater talent engagement, retention, performance, and innovation.

*From the culture it builds to the revenue it brings, inclusive leadership is successful leadership.*

From the culture it builds to the revenue it brings, inclusive leadership is successful leadership. To prioritize inclusivity in the workplace, establish and communicate a clear vision, mission and values, ensure all employees understand expectations and are provided resources and an action plan. Establish hiring practices that are aligned with diversity, equity, and inclusion priorities, and track progress over time. Finally, manage company culture by proactively training, promoting inclusive leadership, and swiftly addressing toxic employee behavior.

If you'd like further guidance or would like to have a conversation about recruiting your next inclusive leader, *please contact us.*