

CREATING AND STRENGTHENING UNITY

AUTHORS

Erin Coupe, Founder of Authentically EC
Lori Thomas, Member Education Manager, WELCOA

In the last decade there has been a substantial focus on the inclusive ‘we’ vs ‘I’ environment. However, we are now seeing the negative effects of this focus due to the narrow specificities of identity it supported. Rather than draw awareness to the familiarity among all human beings, people were essentially steered to identify with those that looked like them and therefore it created unification only among similar types of people. This is a time that calls for all of humanity to build alliance and solidarity. Consider these key factors when aiming to create and strengthen unity within your workforce:

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Diversity and inclusion programs are meant to foster connection and bolster community. It is important to communicate clearly that these programs are not meant to serve as a platform that focuses on how people are different. They are also not meant to be a forum for complaint or victimhood. It falls on leadership to replace the former modes of communicating about diversity to one of unification amongst all employees regardless of how individuals identify. These programs serve a purpose to empower people and provide companies with the opportunity to tap into the strengths of their workforce.

Some important diversity and inclusion initiatives may include changes in company policies and practices, staff training, targeted recruiting and employer-sponsored diversity and inclusion awareness events. It is essential for the organization to develop an action plan to implement these initiatives by setting realistic goals and integrating the initiatives with the core business goals and values. Transparent and concise communication to all levels of leadership in the organization is crucial to equip them with messages to inform, educate, engage and empower employees.

ENCOURAGE AUTHENTICITY

Authenticity creates a work culture where people feel more in tune and connected to their purpose, their team, and to the organization and its purpose. A culture where employees experience being themselves and don’t have to hide or cover up the differences that make them unique. Where, in fact, differences and diversity are welcome. Leadership can and should encourage each person to show up in the manner authentic to them. Key to this is to share with employees what authenticity means, i.e. it is not an excuse to treat others poorly, that’s not authentic. Being authentic means living from within, from the heart and not from the ego. Leaders can develop training modules, bring in guest speakers, share articles or books for suggested reading to help their employees understand that it is okay and in fact encouraged to be authentic at work. The more people feel accepted and heard, the more they will be fulfilled within their role and the more connected and loyal they will feel toward their organization.

Ways to encourage authenticity at your workplace may include:

- » Transparent communication - share as much as you can to help your employees be prepared for any upcoming changes and feel tuned in to what is happening in the company.
- » Listen - really listen to what your employees have to say. Utilize the strengths and ideas you have within your workforce.
- » Lead by example - being authentic and vulnerable can be liberating for both leaders and their team members. This includes admitting mistakes, which earns more trust and respect.

LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

Employees need to see the example set by leadership and feel that leadership supports and values them. Gone are the days where leadership is top down. It is becoming more circular versus triangular meaning that people will learn from each other at every level in the company. Consistent communication from leadership will allow employees to buy in further to ideas being shared by leadership, especially if they are exemplified in behaviors and attitudes of leaders. Companies will benefit by providing leaders with the individual training they need to ensure they manage all people with equanimity.

