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Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Ten Best Practices



Introduction

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) is a top strategic priority for many companies. For DEI to be more than a buzzword, however, companies must implement measures that will drive real change at an individual and organizational level.

The following guide features ten best practices for effectively moving the needle on DEI, drawing on expert knowledge from our summaries, author interviews and customer inputs.

Take-Aways

- The goal of any effective DEI strategy must be to shift mindsets, behaviors and practices to promote an equitable and inclusive organizational culture.
- DEI has the greatest effect when organizations integrate it with business strategy rather than relegating it to a separate initiative.
- Organizations can build a more diverse workforce by diversifying their hiring pool, eliminating barriers during the selection process and setting up onboarding programs.
- Organizations must weave DEI values into everyday company culture by supporting and rewarding people who step up and champion DEI authentically and vocally.
- Setting up mentoring programs and Employee Resource Groups is a powerful way to build psychological safety, mutual understanding and trust.

What Does DEI Mean in the Workplace?

To understand DEI in the workplace, it's important to understand the meaning and significance of all three variables:

Diversity

refers to the presence of differences within the workplace. People are diverse not just in terms of race, ethnicity, gender identity, age and socioeconomic status. Equally relevant also are differences in physical ability, brain function and behavioral traits.

Equity

refers to ensuring that organizational processes and practices are impartial and offer all employees equal opportunities and support to develop and succeed.

Inclusion

is about providing a work environment of psychological safety. It means ensuring that all employees feel comfortable being their authentic selves and sharing their viewpoints and ideas.

The goal of any effective DEI strategy must be to shift mindsets, behaviors and practices to promote an equitable and inclusive organizational culture. A successful DEI policy creates a sense of community and engagement among employees that will translate into higher retention rates and better business outcomes.



Ten Best Practices

1

Think broadly and multidimensionally

When you think about diversity, consider it in the broadest sense. Age, ethnic heritage, race, gender, sexual orientation, and mental and physical abilities may come to mind first, but also consider differences in socioeconomic status, religious views, political beliefs, national origin, moral values, and more. Diversity also includes a cultural dimension, featuring aspects such as body language, ways of managing conflict and views on authority. Finally, people differ with regard to their job function, employment status and tenure within the organization.

Each person possesses a combination of attributes that make them diverse. Thus, organizations don't build true diversity by focusing on just one characteristic – such as a visible or superficial identifier. Genuinely inclusive organizations also pay attention to differences that are not immediately visible – including neurodiversity and educational background – and celebrate the different perspectives each team member brings to the organization.



Expert tip

“More than 70% of our diverse characteristics cannot be measured. Think about the person who is legally blind, or who is a survivor of domestic abuse, or who confides in you that they have a parent that is actively dying. What do all of these characteristics have in common? They are all invisible, they are undetectable, and yet every one of them influences who we are, how we show up at work, and the decisions that we make every day. Diversity and Inclusion also is about those invisible characteristics.”

Joy Dettorre

Global D&I Leader, IBM

2

Be strategic

DEI represents a deeper problem that merits attention at the strategy level. The practices that nurture diversity and inclusion – such as listening, supporting authenticity and accountability – require systemic shifts in a company’s culture. DEI has the greatest effect when organizations integrate it with business strategy rather than relegating it to a separate initiative. If you hold a senior executive position, your role in DEI includes

setting clear and measurable goals, enforcing them and visibly involving yourself in supporting the organization’s initiatives. Executives must lead by example, which they can do by allocating resources for DEI coaching, mentorship and training; increasing their self-awareness about their biases and behaviors; and becoming authentic and vocal champions of DEI.



Expert tip

“Leaders can set the tone by modeling certain behaviors. One powerful thing leaders can do is talk about their own mistakes. They could say something like, ‘I know I’ve made mistakes in the past and I will continue to make mistakes. However, whenever I do, I’m going to let you all know.’ When a mistake is made, it’s very important for leaders to own it, share the feedback they’ve received and outline the next steps they will take to remedy the situation. This will let people know they won’t be punished for expressing their concerns and that their input will be heard. If more and more leaders feel comfortable talking about their mistakes, the behavior will eventually become part of the company culture.”

Tayo Rockson

Author and diversity consultant

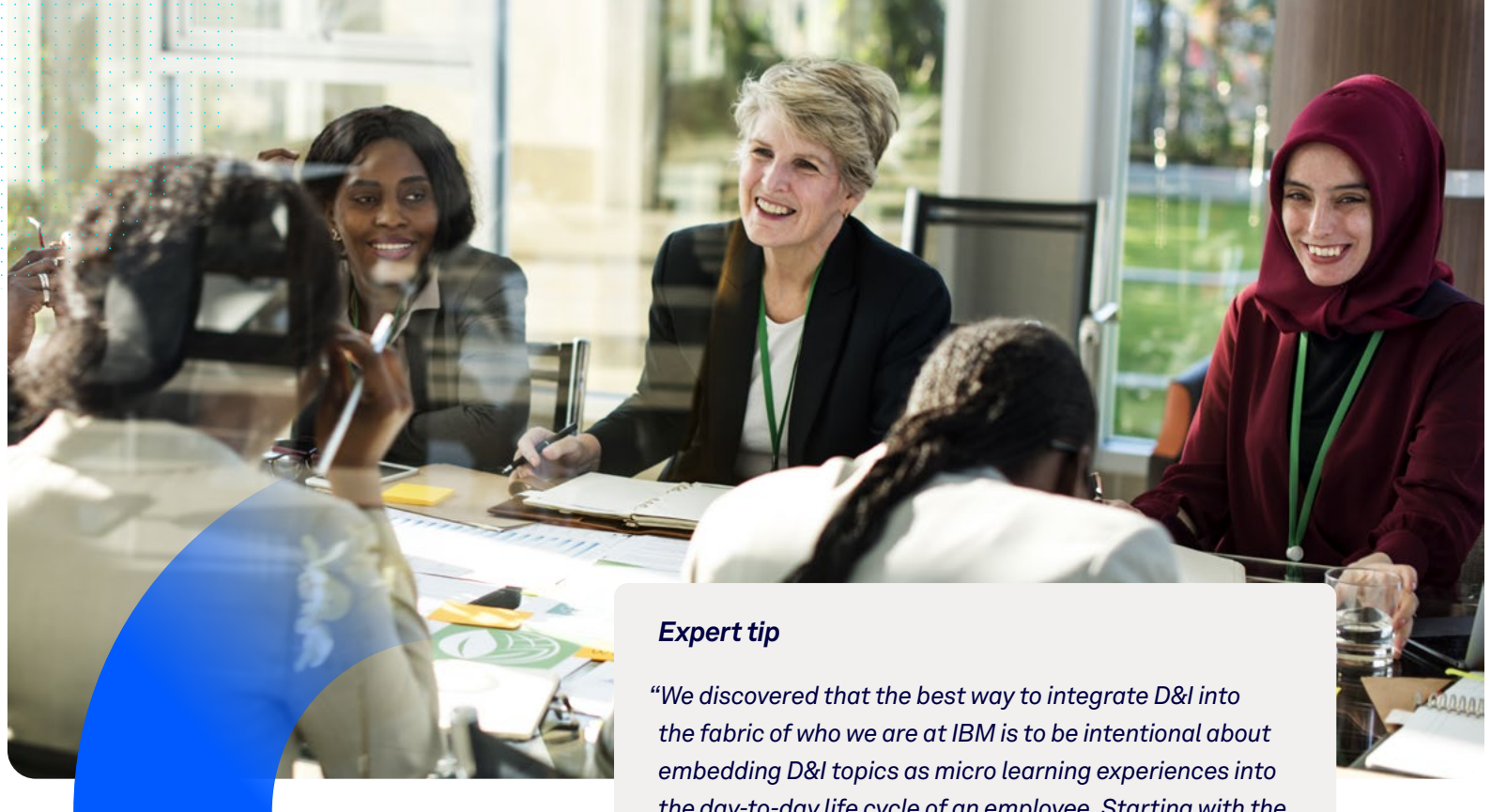
3

Don't make assumptions – gather data

The DEI tactics you employ in service of your broader strategy will need to address specific barriers to diversity and inclusion – which can differ from team to team and from one geographic location to another. The best way to identify these barriers is through focus groups and anonymized surveys.

Once you have collected some data, you can change your practices accordingly. Harvard professor Iris Bohnet recommends using the DESIGN acronym: Worthy design

starts with “data.” Study the area that concerns you. Does gender inequality exist? Where is the lack of balance, and which people know why? Next, “experiment” with different strategies to address your areas of concern. As you learn, place “signposts” to guide people. Keep everyone posted about what is going on and what you learn. Tools like employee surveys will help you keep tabs on your progress.



Expert tip

“We discovered that the best way to integrate D&I into the fabric of who we are at IBM is to be intentional about embedding D&I topics as micro learning experiences into the day-to-day life cycle of an employee. Starting with the hiring process, we make sure to include neurodivergent inclusive behaviors in job descriptions and offer more inclusive interview styles. [...] Moreover, IBM provides onboarding support for neurodiverse hires, as well as training on neuroinclusion for managers and employees at every level. IBM also promotes allyship and makes it part of employees’ performance reviews.”

Diane Delaney

Global D&I Leader for People with Diverse Abilities, IBM

4

Examine hiring practices

Your company can only be as diverse as the pool from which you are hiring. Examine your sourcing channels to see where you post job ads and what those ads say that might encourage or discourage diverse applicants. Specify the skills and traits you require for each job and eliminate everything extraneous. Avoid gender-suggestive language, slang, jargon and ambiguous statements or requirements. Hiring on the basis of clear criteria, such as anonymous assessments, can radically improve the diversity of the final slate of candidates.

Establish a policy around recruiting for diversity of thought, and explain how it will benefit the firm. Beware of overfocusing on “culture fit,” since hiring close matches can lead to homogeneous teams and groupthink. Some highly qualified candidates may be more comfortable submitting work samples or work-related tests than sitting through lengthy interviews or engaging in small talk.



Expert tip

“Organizations have a brilliant opportunity to increase diversity of thought by removing barriers [in the hiring process]. For example, a dyslexic job candidate will struggle if you ask them to write down a lot of information. But they may excel at the task if you ask them to share the same information by talking into a piece of technology.”

Theo Smith

Author and neurodiversity advocate

5

Invest in onboarding and provide continuing support

Nearly one-third of new workers quit in their first 90 days. Others may stay in unhappy, unproductive situations that benefit neither them nor the firm. These statistics improve with the quality of a company's onboarding. People will differ in the amount and type of support they need to feel included in their new workplace.

For new hires who work from home, consider their preferences in communication, video meetings and work hours. Share the unspoken elements of the firm's culture with new hires, assign each a peer mentor, and discuss a training and development plan with them. Company resource groups are a great way of connecting new hires with people in the company who share similar attributes, skills, challenges or interests.



Expert tip

“It’s better for organizations to retain hard-working and innovative employees than to recruit new people. At any organization, 10 – 30% of current employees may be underperforming and considering leaving because they do not get the right support. There is a lot of untapped potential for organizations willing to find out how they can better support their people and make necessary adaptations.”

Theo Smith

Author and neurodiversity advocate

6

Get all employees involved

For real DEI change to take place, individual contributors, frontline managers, senior executives and HR professionals must become fully involved. Any employee, no matter their role or level, can become a diversity ambassador – someone who represents and promotes diversity – and help create an environment in which all employees feel valued and included.

For senior executives, this means allocating resources for DEI coaching, mentorship and training to empower employees at all levels to become effective diversity ambassadors. The goal is to weave DEI values into everyday company culture by supporting and rewarding people who step up and champion DEI authentically and vocally.



Expert tip

“At Snow Software, we spent Q4 focusing our efforts on education and awareness. We hosted learning sessions on topics such as the menopause, gender-inclusive language and gender identities, mental health and effective allyship behaviors. These sessions are highly interactive and action-oriented. We recognize that we still have a lot to learn on our journey to becoming a truly inclusive, safe organization. We are committed to doing the work and to holding each other accountable.”

Helen Haynes

Director of Learning and Development,
Snow Software

7

Confront microaggressions

Structural exclusion is often easier to identify than “subtle acts of exclusion” (SAEs), sometimes also referred to as “microaggressions.” Everyone performs acts of exclusion, most often out of ignorance or unconscious bias. SAEs are inevitable when diverse teams work together, and it is upon senior leadership to create a company culture in which people call out SAEs when they happen.

Corporate guidelines against SAEs have many benefits, including fostering trust and collaboration, creating a productive setting for feedback, helping everyone feel included and establishing a culture of transparency.

Inclusive corporate cultures insist that everyone should notice and call out SAEs when they happen. Initiators must understand how they have committed a transgression and, rather than become defensive, they should vow to do better. Progress in achieving diversity goals begins when each person becomes aware of their biases and how they can hurt others.



Expert tip

“The more people learn about each other and the different communities within the organization, the more inclusive your work environment becomes.”

Diane Delaney

Global D&I Leader for People with Diverse Abilities, IBM

8

Guarantee psychological safety

To feel they fully belong, people must be able to bring their full selves to work. And this includes all aspects of people's personal lives: parenthood, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, veteran status, disability and other attributes central to their identity. Leaders and managers encourage employees' uniqueness by welcoming differences, getting to know people personally, treating them fairly, hiring individuals who think differently, and drawing out those differences. Psychological safety creates a foundation of respect and permission where people value and appreciate

others, and allows them to belong, connect and participate. Creating a feeling of psychological safety in a group is the opposite of merely "being nice." It requires team members to confront each other and work through their issues. As a leader, you can invite others to open up and share by showing vulnerability and asking for honest feedback. Leaders and managers build belonging by practicing transparency, granting team members autonomy over their work and decisions, encouraging collegiality, and celebrating DEI as a core value.



Expert tip

"The problem with fitting in is that you're trying to be somebody you're not. You're trying to copy behaviors that are not yours naturally, and you're doing that instead of focusing on your own strengths. The way to success is knowing your strengths and using them. You will never be successful by copying someone else's behaviours and strengths – you will just be a diluted version of them, instead of the full, powerful version of you."

Gill Whitty-Collins

Author and consultant

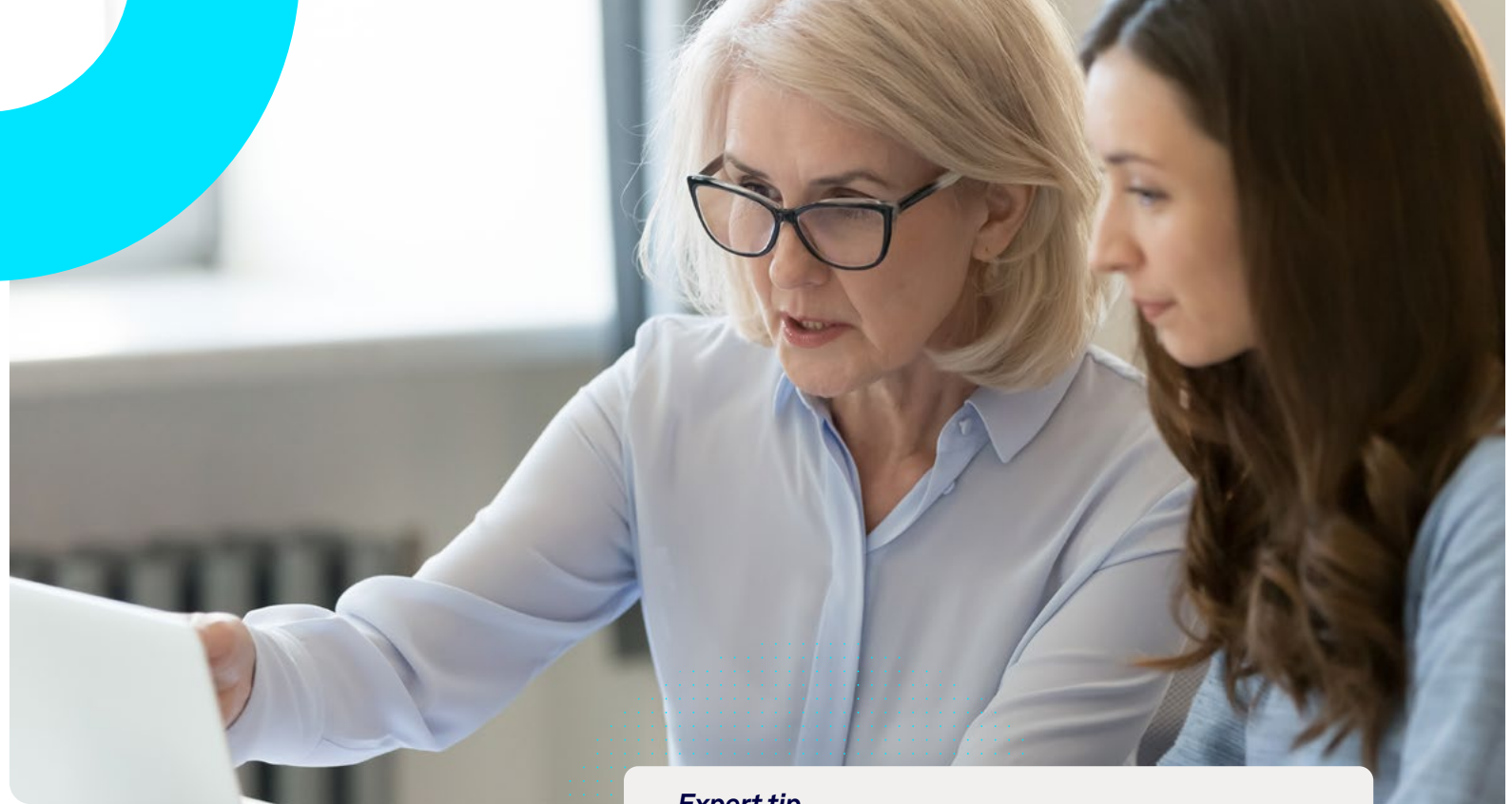
9

Develop mentorship programs

In a diverse organization, everyone can learn from everyone else, regardless of age, job title or racial background. Mentoring programs are a powerful way to bring employees together and build mutual understanding and trust. Traditional mentoring programs pair junior employees and senior coaches, new staff and veteran workers, and new leaders and directors.

In addition, organizations will want to launch reverse mentoring programs, which match junior team members, often from underrepresented

groups, with senior employees. Reverse mentoring encourages intergenerational communication. In addition, senior staff can take what they learn into account when making decisions and represent the views of junior staff among the leadership team. Finally, co-mentoring programs, designed to encourage two-way communication among co-workers from different cultures, ethnicities and generations, will further support an organization's goal of increasing inclusion.



Expert tip

“I like the metaphor of raising the human antenna. In the old days, we used to have radios where you had to raise the antenna all the way up and then move it around until you could hear the radio messages clearly. We can apply this analogy to human interactions. We need to raise our human antenna. Whenever you interact with people, pay attention to who they are and where they come from.”

Maya Hu-Chan

Leadership coach and author

10

Sponsor Employee Resource Groups

An effective, low-cost way to develop support for diversity policies are Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). Senior management's role is to kickstart the process by explaining their purpose and freeing up resources – such as giving permission to spend a certain number of working hours in resource group meetings. Employees then create the groups around shared characteristics, interests or experiences. ERGs may

be formed around gender, ethnicity, veteran status, parenthood, or even a shared hobby. The groups create safe spaces for members to discuss personal and professional challenges and interests. Although ERGs are employee-led, executive sponsors of ERGs will want to help shape the groups' efforts to complement the company's DEI goals by checking in from time to time or attending occasional meetings.

Designated ERG team members, in turn, should identify primary DEI issues that come up in meetings and give feedback to upper management. Though started as a strategic, top-down initiative, ERGs are structured to generate bottom-up feedback, enabling senior management to adjust its DEI strategy as a dynamic, ever-evolving work in progress.

Expert tip

“At Western Union, the passionate volunteers leading our ERGs coordinated six global events and numerous regional celebrations to educate, increase awareness and foster an inclusive work environment for all.”

Quinn Slaughter

Global DEI Group Leader, Western Union



Conclusion

Work cultures based on the values of diversity, equity and inclusion focus on human capital. Such cultures take a team approach to work, value diverse ideas and input, and ensure everyone feels equal in conversations, regardless of their background. People in inclusive work cultures call out those who use language or make jokes that disrespect people who are different than themselves. They respect and understand one another's different roles and invite team members to present solutions when something bothers

them. DEI-promoting work cultures provide the psychological safety people need to flourish at their jobs – which will translate into enhanced employee engagement, productivity and innovation.

Expert tip

“We need to get to a stage where we accept that difference is normal”

Theo Smith

Author and neurodiversity advocate

Resources

1 | Think broadly and multidimensionally



How to Be a Diversity and Inclusion Ambassador
Celeste Warren
getab.li/wp1706



Lead the Change
Kelly L. Cooper
getab.li/wp1707



The Remix
Lindsey Pollak
getab.li/wp1708



Neurodiversity – A Vital Aspect...
Philippa Lamb, Margaret Malpas, Kirsty Wilson and Jill Miller
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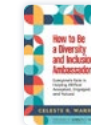


Creating Introvert-Friendly Work...
Jennifer Kahnweiler
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“The Conventional Recruitment Process Already Discriminates...”
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2 | Be strategic



How to Be a Diversity and Inclusion Ambassador
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Elevating Equity
Josh Bersin
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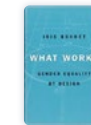


Diversity Is Just the First Step...
Frances Brooks Taplett, Matt Krentz, Justin Dean and Gabrielle Novacek
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How to Set the Parameters for Inclusion
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3 | Don't make assumptions – gather data



What Works
Iris Bohnet
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Inclusion on Purpose
Ruchika Tulshyan
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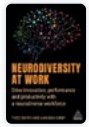


Erasing Institutional Bias
Tiffany Jana and Ashley Diaz Mejias
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Frances Brooks Taplett, Matt Krentz, Justin Dean and Gabrielle Novacek
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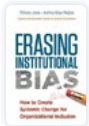
4 | Examine hiring practices



Neurodiversity at Work
Amanda Kirby and Theo Smith
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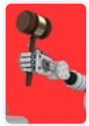
Inclusion on Purpose
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Erasing Institutional Bias
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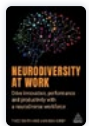


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5 | Invest in onboarding and provide continuing support



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Pierre Dupreelle, Jeff Lindquist, Simon Pellas, Gabrielle Novacek and Nathan Micon
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6 | Get all employees involved



How to Be a Diversity and Inclusion Ambassador
Celeste Warren
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Expand Beyond Your Current Culture
Leslie Short
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Use Your Difference to Make a Difference
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Take Action for LGBTQ Inclusion at Work
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7 | Confront microaggressions



The Leader’s Guide to Unconscious Bias
Pamela Fuller, Anne Chow and Mark Murphy
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Subtle Acts of Exclusion
Tiffany Jana and Michael Baran
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“The Way to Success Is Knowing Your Strengths and Using Them.”
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8 | Guarantee psychological safety



Inclusify
Stefanie Johnson
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The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety
Timothy R. Clark
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A Culture of Safety
Alla Weinberg
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9 | Develop mentorship programs



Reverse Mentoring with Patrice Gordon
Brené Brown and Patrice Gordon
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The Remix
Lindsey Pollak
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10 | Sponsor Employee Resource Groups



Advancing Inclusion
Deborah L. Plummer
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Expand Beyond Your Current Culture
Leslie Short
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A New LGBTQ Workforce Has Arrived...
Pierre Dupreelle, Jeff Lindquist, Simon Pellas, Gabrielle Novacek and Nathan Micon
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How to Unleash the Connective Power of ERGs
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Fifth Global L&D Knowledge Forum Wrap-Up
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