

IMPACTFUL STEPS THE C-SUITE CAN TAKE TO CREATE A MORE DIVERSE WORKPLACE



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Discussion around diversity and inclusion is increasing in frequency within companies. So let's get on the same page: **Diversity** refers to the people working at your company, who have a variety of different experiences and points of view. **Inclusion** requires proactive steps to make sure that those different points of view are heard, supported, and advanced. Fostering **Equity** requires implementing fully-realized methods for responding to and combatting bias, harassment, and discrimination.

Starting with definitions may seem unnecessary, but with so much misunderstanding and misinformation in our culture, it is absolutely warranted. And as a leader, this is especially important. Impactful change in business almost always begins as a **c-suite initiative**.

A MAJOR ROADBLOCK FOR DE&I: UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

The definition of a bias is prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair. This bias can cause you to act in unjust ways toward a certain person or group of people. Unconscious bias is a learned stereotype that is automatic, unintentional, deeply ingrained, universal, and able to influence behavior.

95% of the mind's function is unconscious, which means that at any given moment, eleven million bits of information flood our senses and overwhelm our brain's capacity to process them. To digest this information efficiently — since the brain can only process 50 bits per second — our brain creates shortcuts to help us make decisions.

While these unconscious biases come from our collected perception and experiences, they often do not have merit for the particular situation being discussed. It's time to stop making the exception the rule. These seemingly harmless assumptions aren't just wrong, but are extremely detrimental to those affected, and to the health of your

company. They don't just inaccurately reflect real life, they set the standard for future interactions.

The best way to untangle this is to embrace **conscious inclusion**, the practice of identifying values and leveraging differences to achieve superior results (i.e., doing more than just acknowledging unconscious bias) when deciding how to uphold diversity in your workplace.

What does conscious inclusion look like?

THE IMPORTANCE OF INVESTING IN DE&I INITIATIVES

From an objective, business-first perspective, there is no downside to investing in DE&I. In fact, the statistics prove that there is no risk, only reward. Sound too good to be true? A study by Glassdoor concluded two-thirds (roughly 67%) of job seekers consider diversity a determining factor when considering employment, and more than half of current employees want more diversity in their workplace. 57% indicated that their company did not have comprehensive, thought-out D&I initiatives. What's more, is that companies with [higher-than-average diversity](#) showed 19% higher innovation revenues. That means roughly two-thirds of companies are not maximizing their potential by investing in D&I initiatives.

Making D&I a priority in your organization won't just attract the most qualified employees; they'll stay longer, be happier, feel supported to do their best work, and raise the bar on success every single time. It must become more than meeting the baseline of "fairness", but an active pursuit of a company's full potential.

WHAT DOES DIVERSITY LOOK LIKE?

Diversity exists in two separate but equal worlds, inherent and acquired. **Inherent diversity** refers to congenital attributes (sexual orientation, gender identity, race), whereas **acquired diversity** speaks to characteristics developed through life experience (military experience, age). Creating functional, "2-D" approaches to inclusion is a great starting point.

HOW TO TRACK DIVERSITY, TURNOVER, AND COMPANY DEMOGRAPHICS IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

Business owners often misstep when opting for an internal process instead of implementing something new into their tech stack. But let me assure you, choosing a tool like a [Diversity Dashboard](#) saves you from reinventing an already functional wheel.

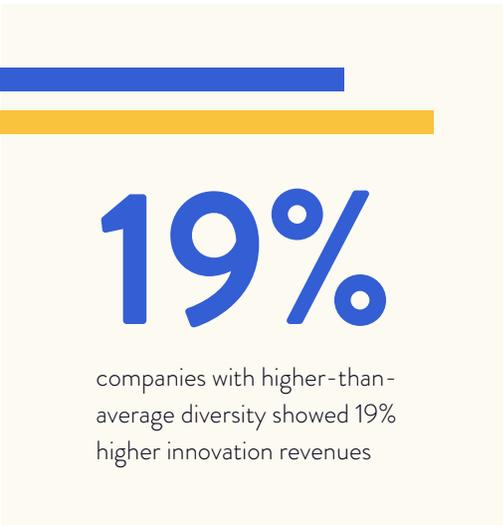
THINGS YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW TO SUPPORT DE&I:

PUBLISH PAY EQUALITY STATISTICS

This really takes the challenge to put your money where your mouth is head-on. If you're committed to compensating employees fairly, take a transparent approach and publish your data. Transparency plays a large role in a company's accountability. Creating secrecy around pay leaves room for rumor and potential unfair advantage amongst your employees. It is well known that there is a wage gap between men and women in America. Most companies shrug, as if this is an unavoidable fact. It is not. Employees should not be afraid to ask for fair pay. In fact, they should demand compensation for their work.

PRIORITIZE ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE DESIGN

All too often, we create without being inclusive of all people. In doing so, we further isolate already marginalized people and continue to give life to harmful ideas that result from a lack of representation. As our society continues to become more technologically



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advanced, it is imperative that we include everyone in the conversation, regardless of their mental abilities.

My company, Walk West, has forged a unique partnership with LCI Tech. LCI Tech is committed to digital equity, vetting websites to make sure all content and navigation is usable for those who are impaired. The vast majority of websites are not digitally compliant, which is a requirement by law. 20% of Americans are legally blind. That means 20% of people are inhibited from consuming content, or even having the option to purchase what they need online. This is a major miss for companies around the globe, and unacceptable from a human rights perspective.

Walk West continues to make accessible design an imperative on all of the websites we design and develop. Our relationship with LCI Tech continues to grow and inform our D&I practice. It's essential not just to question your bias but also to adopt processes as standard operating procedures within your company.

ENCOURAGE DE&I WORKSHOPS AND CONTINUED EDUCATION.

Set the tone for your employees by attending and thoughtfully positing that others follow suit with comprehensive diversity and inclusion training, like The Diversity Movement. The Diversity Movement is led by a team of experts, from business experts and angel investors to nationally recognized TEDx speakers. Each team member is prepared to inspire and provide actionable insights for your organization.

Allow these experts in this field guide you as they address the ways in which racism is a “fierce, ever-present, challenging force, one which has structured the thinking, behavior, and actions of individuals and institutions since the beginning of U.S. history.” Understanding and dismantling these racist systems and structures requires an equal and opposing force, one that can (and should) start with you.

PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH

In order for a movement to be truly successful, it must be supported by the c-suite.

I'm proud of our team at Walk West for initiating D&I practices in every aspect of our business. Our executive team has worked hard to develop The Diversity Movement. This movement is comprised of people from all backgrounds and life experiences who have come together for a common cause. But really, it's more than a cause. Diversity and inclusion are a journey, a continual process unfolding into a way of living and doing business.

The Diversity Movement offers courses for your business to help assess how comprehensive your D&I programs are, if any, and gives you the tools necessary to further implement these programs. Our approach to D&I builds better teams, relationships, and businesses as a whole. It's time to make D&I more than a company culture, but a foundational mindset and way of living.

Donald Thompson is a thought leader on diversity and inclusion, influencing company culture and driving exponential growth. Adept at building teams that accelerate growth, Donald is also CEO of Walk West, a digital marketing firm led by more than 70% women and/or African Americans, recognized by Inc. as the fastest growing agency in North Carolina for 2018 and 2019.



20%

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