



TOPICS COVERED

// *Diversity & Bias*

It's no secret that a diverse and inclusive workplace has become critical for success. Clients, investors and talent are increasingly attracted to companies with socially responsible values and progressive workplace policies - with good reason. Diversity and inclusion have been linked to innovation, financial results and employee engagement.

Yet many organizations have long struggled to create impactful diversity and inclusion programs, particularly when it comes to increasing diversity at senior levels. While there is no silver bullet to eliminate bias, you can advance your diversity and inclusion program by making it a core component of your corporate culture and implementing practical strategies to update your initiative.

Déjà Vu All Over Again

Almost twenty years ago, the New York Times reported on the challenges of diversifying a workforce. The 1996 article, "Networks Are Created And Managers Made Accountable," identified various efforts that began "a decade ago"—i.e., in the 80's— such as "quotas for hiring minorities and women," recruitment outreach, training, mentors, flexible hours and anti-bias workshops. Those efforts, it turned out, did little for career advancement, and companies were responding with "renewed" diversity campaigns to level the playing field through increased accountability for management.

Sound familiar? Replace "quotas" with goals or targets, and we're talking about some of today's most common strategies in diversity programs. Those strategies, it turns out, have yet to resolve the shortcomings in the diversity of corporate leadership. According to the Women in the Workplace 2017 study by LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company, women are underrepresented at every level of the corporate pipeline. Female representation declines with each step toward the C-suite, with women of color experiencing both the greatest disproportion and most significant drop-off rates in senior roles. As of April 2018, only 24 Fortune 500 companies, less than 5%, are run by female CEOs. Only two of those are women of color, and none are African American.

If in 1996 we knew that it was not simply a "matter of time" before the management ranks reflected the diverse talent in the workforce, what are we still waiting for?

DON'T SETTLE FOR STATUS QUO

Advancing Your Organization's D&I Program

Written by Meredith Kaufman

While #MeToo unveiled the way companies still do not have a handle on the pervasiveness of sexual harassment, many commenters have pointed out that harassment remains an issue in part because the number of female leaders in many corporate settings is disproportionately small. Meredith Kaufman explores meaningful steps diversity and inclusion programs can take to help elevate women and other minorities in the workplace.

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It will take a lot to unpack exactly why certain diversity efforts have not been more successful, but workplace culture is a major component. The concept of inclusion is not new, but as the intangible counterpart to diversity, it can be hard to measure and challenging to improve. Diversity is a (literal) seat at the table – you can count who is present, assess your progress and set goals for the future. Inclusion, on the other hand, is having a voice at that table and being heard. Although inclusion can't be quantified, high turnover for diverse employees or homogenous senior leadership may be signs that your workplace culture is excluding or devaluing certain groups.

Advancing Your D&I Program

Fortunately, the corporate commitment to diversity and inclusion efforts continues to grow. But this growing commitment comes with renewed questions over what methods are effective. Below, we take a look at how certain diversity and inclusion strategies can be improved to help achieve better results.

Make Your Diversity and Inclusion Program a Core Component of Your Corporate Culture

Diversity and inclusion efforts were traditionally considered a human resources function. Today, many companies have employees and officers dedicated to these initiatives, ensuring these programs are a priority and run by individuals with the right substantive expertise. This trend is clearly a step in the right direction, but

your diversity leaders must be charged with, and capable of, getting the C-suite buy-in for their initiatives. Your senior leadership team sets the tone for corporate culture, and if they are not invested in and held accountable for your diversity and inclusion goals, you'll be stuck with the status quo.

Improve Diverse Recruitment at Every Stage of the Process

"Cast a wider net" has been the mantra for diverse hiring for decades. Expanding the applicant pool through outreach programs may lead to more diverse applicants, but the wider pool does not always translate to more diverse hires. If your wider net has not improved diversity in hiring, consider examining where you lose candidates in the recruitment process and whether your practices can be improved to reduce bias. Perhaps your job descriptions contain language that is unintentionally biased toward one gender (think strong, competitive, aggressive), or unstructured interviews are opening the door to inconsistent and biased results.

Fix Unconscious Bias Training Programs

Unconscious bias deeply permeates workplace interactions and decisions. Traditional training programs were designed to raise awareness around the im-

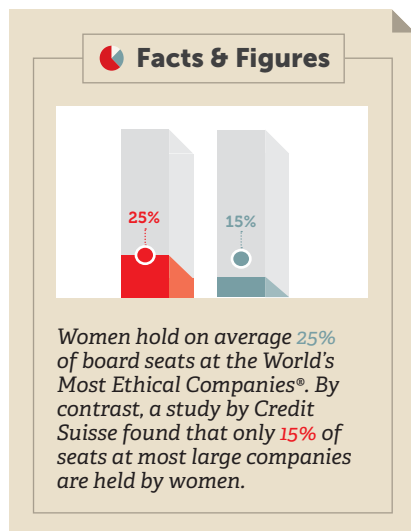
plicit biases and prejudices we all have. These programs have come under scrutiny lately for being ineffective and potentially normalizing and reinforcing stereotypes, leaving employers questioning whether they should eliminate this type of training altogether. There is a better way: action-oriented training programs that teach employees to manage their biases can help change their behavior, and by coupling bias awareness with steps to counteract it, you avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

Implement a Comprehensive Strategy For Inclusion

Companies need to take a comprehensive approach to making the workplace more inclusive. Starting at the top, senior leadership should engage with employees, encourage them to share their views, respond to their concerns and accept their feedback. Leaders need to be authentic and share their own diversity of thought to set an example for their teams. Sponsorship programs, where senior leaders advocate for opportunities for their protégés and increase their visibility in the workplace, can help employees feel more connected and better supported, not to mention increase their potential for advancement. Social dynamics and cultural issues should also be addressed. If, for example, you find that female employees are being interrupted in meetings often ("maninterrupting") or not speaking up, consider soliciting their input, actively discouraging interruptions, and emphasizing respectful conduct.

Diversity and inclusion practices, when they work, will not only help your office culture, but can keep employees engaged, improve retention and drive innovation. You're not alone if you've hit a diversity plateau, but if you don't take action soon, you'll fall behind.

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Author Biography

Meredith Kaufman is a partner in Baker McKenzie's Employment & Compensation Practice Group in New York. She has represented employers in all types of employment litigation throughout her career. She also advises employers in the financial services, retail, technology, and other industries on a wide range of employment issues.