

THE VOICES ON OUR TEAM(S); DO WE HEAR THEM?

Often when we hear about DEI, automatically we associate it with hiring and retaining black and brown bodies. And as I pondered on which story I wanted to share, I wanted to challenge us to expand our lenses to the true meaning of diversity (which I define as meaning different), equity (having the quality of being fair and impartial) and inclusion (the action of including all involved parties within a group).

I recently had a review with a team lead on a project that highlighted the importance of intentionally practicing DEI in all aspects of life. It was supposed to be a collaborative project, but my experience was anything but. I was responsible for running point on building the recovery models for a particularly challenging account to simplify the reconciliation process and did so with minimal input from the team lead, but I had to get his approval before submitting it to the client, which I received with high praise.

However, because I wasn't in the proverbial room when the file was being discussed, I wasn't able to provide insight as to why I had elected to set up the file as was presented which was different from the client's expectations. The team lead was unable to convey the impact to the client which reduced their confidence in the work presented, leading to frustration on their end which ultimately strains the relationship and makes it more challenging to bid other deals.

After I had worked through my feelings at the dismal of all the work I had put in, I had to reflect and recognize this as an opportunity to see how we failed to implement the better parts of DEI and how it led us to the outcome that we had. Below is a summary of the components where we missed the mark.

Diverse- having more voices in the room, provides alternative solutions to a potential structural change which when examined can lead to better scale, and efficiencies as well as a more rounded solution. Working through the logistics of how to get there may be challenging but the result is worth it. Sometimes as leaders we may have a particular way of doing something, but that doesn't mean it is the only way. We should be able to listen to input from other team members, regardless of title.

Equity- it is imperative that all the voices in the room have equal participation and understanding that equal doesn't mean the same. But allowing each voice to take ownership and have a stake in the deliverable is likely to yield a better-quality product. Sometimes the contributors have different levels of experience/expertise and as such some group members will need more support than others. If the deliverable isn't up to par, determining the root cause and setting better guidelines for the next deliverable is better than placing blame on just one person (or process).

Inclusion- it doesn't matter that we have a multitude of voices in the room if we are just filling a quota or checking off an HR requirement to be politically correct. It is imperative that all the voices in the room feel that they will be heard, and their input considered. This has the positive impact of keeping the group members engaged, as they feel their contribution is valued, and it provides insight to what strengths/opportunities exist within the dynamic to build a more cohesive team. Otherwise, we risk having unutilized capacity within the group.

With deliberate practice of DEI even on teams that may appear nuclear, it opens a plethora of ways in which we can build more solid, cohesive, engaged, and dynamic teams which make the days easier and the work more enjoyable. This will inevitably attract more talent and retain the already existing members because they feel seen, heard, and intentionally considered.

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