

# Tips for Leading a Diverse Team



Success is a team sport, and the imperative to communicate, collaborate, and build diverse and inclusive teams has never been greater. Enjoy this guest post by Adrian Johansen.

Now more than ever, companies need to prioritize diversity and inclusion. Gone are the days when diversity was solely regarded as a checkbox to tick. Championing diversity and inclusion is good for innovation, culture, and business. Moreover, the workplace plays a huge part in shaping the lives of its employees and society as a whole, and inclusivity that stems here can spark real change.

Though companies already have diversity on the agenda, the 2020 pandemic and the resulting surge in remote hiring has allowed more businesses to hire across borders. Even when in-

person working picks up, diversity will continue to be upfront and center.

So how does one inculcate inclusion and build diverse teams? The answer points to leadership.

Training management to actively promote a culture of diversity is an ongoing process and here are a few tips that can help:

## **Understand and address diversity as a spectrum**

Often, when you say 'diversity', people think religion, race, gender. While these are all included, companies need to understand that it also extends to diversity in personality, background, age, and sexual orientation. As a leader, learn about and make room for different kinds of diversity, as well as account for the differences that might arise because of it.

## **Develop empathy**

Every employee is different and experiences the workplace differently. The only way to be a leader who factors in these experiences is to learn how to walk a mile in their shoes, and empathize. Many argue that empathy is too emotional for the workplace, but an article by Western Governors University (WGU) makes the case for a healthy emotional balance. To support this point, it points out that when employees feel their leaders empathize with them, they're more productive, more loyal, and happier to come to work. In turn, empathy builds a personal connection and that builds stronger teams.

WGU goes on to say that empathy, though often inherent, can be developed through certain practices. These include learning more about your employees, taking an interest in their ambitions and concerns, stepping out from one's own bubble to consider other perspectives, and so on. And contrary to

misconception, empathy doesn't make a leader soft. It only proves their mettle and their ability to support their team in challenging times, as stated in our previous article on leadership.

## **Create formal diversity policies**

While a company may hire diversely, what are they doing to support their minority employees in the workplace? Creating strategic, thoughtful policies that value, understand, and encourage diverse employees has multiple benefits. First, these are a formal, tangible show of support from the company. Second, they safeguard the well-being of diverse employees and showcase employers' intentions. They also help create transparency and accountability within the workspace.

These policies should be formed by Diversity and Inclusion experts. Policies can be based on non-discrimination and anti-harassment principles like:

- Abusing authority to demean someone or have them perform tasks outside their role.
- Undermining a colleague or refusing to cooperate.
- Discriminating and mistreating someone based on their race, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation, etc.
- Passing unwanted and unsavory remarks.
- Spreading rumors, gossiping, or bullying other employees.

And they can also be policies that outline programs, tools, and resources to empower minority employees.

## **Change your recruitment strategy**

The best first step to diversify internally is to change how you hire externally. To make sure your company is more attractive to a diverse workforce, consider changing your recruitment approach by:

- Showcasing your pro-diversity policies: Let candidates know that your workplace is a safe, welcome, and inclusive space.
- Using technology: Minimize human bias by using AI to shortlist candidates based on their qualifications.
- Identifying and overcoming bias: It's important to make sure your recruitment team undergoes tests like the Harvard Implicit Association Test and others, to identify any unconscious bias and work on it.
- Working with partners: Partner up with organizations that champion diverse minorities and can send the best candidates your way.

## **Take feedback**

The only way to understand your team's needs is to listen to them. Set up feedback sessions that empower people to speak up about their concerns or needs. You can do this by having an open-door policy, host town hall meetings, or have anonymous feedback surveys. Regular feedback sessions that are productive and then implemented make for better, happier, and more secure employees and a more cohesive company culture.

## **Encourage collaboration**

Bring together team members that have different backgrounds but complement each other's professional strengths. Encourage open, honest, and respectful debate to fuel creative collaboration. Leaders can also help the foster community by bringing together team members over passions they share outside work!

## **Measure and evaluate**

Managers and leaders should regularly check in with themselves to evaluate if their initiatives are working and what could be

better. Pay attention to how your employees are feeling, what their feedback is, and show them that their inputs and experiences matter. Involve diverse employees when creating programs and policies for them so that it isn't a top-down dialogue, but a collaborative effort that works.

## Conclusion

Diverse teams make your company so much stronger, more innovative, and a much more enjoyable workplace. Not only that, diversity boosts business, with studies showing that companies with diverse management report 20% higher innovation revenue as compared with those who don't. Creating and leading a diverse team is not just necessary, it's a given.



**Author Bio:** Adrian Johansen is a writer and consultant in the Pacific Northwest. She loves sharing knowledge with others and learning along the way. You can find more of her writing [here](#).