

foster diversity & inclusion  
in times of crisis.



## help diverse talent feel seen, heard and valued in virtual environments.

Creating a diverse and inclusive workplace has always been important. But as the world contends with the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting economic challenges and ongoing social unrest, how can you ensure that your diversity and inclusion initiatives don't get derailed?

With many people still safely working remotely, some employees – especially those of ethnically diverse backgrounds – may feel more disconnected than ever. Creating a more inclusive environment is crucial to building and maintaining a high-performing team of collaborative individuals who feel comfortable sharing their ideas and are motivated to achieve company goals.



## keep diversity & inclusion at the forefront.

The benefits of creating a diverse workplace are well known, but what happens if you don't make the effort? Not only will employees feel disconnected and disengaged, but there can be a real financial impact.

Research shows that [71% of professionals have felt excluded](#) within a six-month period, and that turnover is significantly higher three years after an employee experiences exclusion. Meanwhile, data from Gallup shows that when workers are disengaged or not included, it can cost the economy [\\$450 to \\$550 billion](#) each year due to lost productivity.

The reason for this ties back to human evolution. The nervous system was built to detect when we feel embraced or threatened, and we respond accordingly. When people feel opposed or unheard, they are less likely to engage. When in a group that is encouraging and listens to them, however, professionals are 4.6 times more likely to [feel empowered and perform at their best](#).

In addition to driving performance of the current team, a diverse and inclusive environment can help attract new talent. According to [Glassdoor](#), 67% of candidates examine how diverse an organization is, and whether it has an inclusive culture, when considering companies and job offers.

While the advantages of diversity and inclusion in the workplace are clear, to be truly effective, you'll need to do more than just check boxes. Inclusivity needs to be effectively woven into your company's culture at every level.

## new challenges in a new landscape.

Part of fostering an inclusive culture is understanding what is most important to employees — something that will continuously evolve. A [study by the CFA Institute](#) found the top priority for employees right now is that companies be flexible. This is especially important as times of high stress can make it hard to follow previously accepted rules and expectations. Adding complexity to the situation, people tend to return to their natural biases during stressful times and may say or do things that might not be appropriate or acceptable.

Helping employees manage the stress they're feeling and their default way of thinking is crucial. One way inclusive leadership can do this is by scheduling optional 15-minute meetings each day with their teams. These optional meetings should focus on making employees feel safe, give them the opportunity to share what's on their mind, and continue to foster self-awareness and appreciation for others' uniqueness and value. No one should be forced to share or participate in these meetings, but offering this platform can help your team feel seen and heard, while creating greater understanding and empathy across the team.

For ethnically diverse employees, who may already feel vulnerable in settings where they are in the minority, current world events can be even more stressful. Growing awareness around racial disparities may resurface old wounds while creating new ones. And, working remotely can exacerbate feelings of isolation and vulnerability.

These employees may simply want to engage in conversation and know their voices are heard without judgement. Such conversations should be conducted with a high level of empathy and emotional intelligence. When such conversations arise, challenge yourself to say less and listen more. Know that you may not have all the answers, but be present, genuine and willing to learn.

Overall, it's crucial to create solidarity and make everyone feel safe and included. With safety comes a level of trust and a level of cooperation, which are integral at this time.

# how to be an inclusive leader.

Business and team leaders are responsible for shaping the goals, priorities and culture of their organization – and fostering inclusion in the workplace is no exception. It's not just a matter of setting the vision for a more inclusive culture, but making sure that vision is embraced and evident through your organization's communications and actions.

Consider the following actions that can help you continue advancing diversity and inclusion at work, even during times of crisis:

## 1. Remind employees why it's important.

Repetition is the key to success, but those conversations should be held in a transparent and authentic way. Develop a cadence of communications that focus on your diversity and inclusion values, while ensuring employees know they have support and will be heard. Encourage talent to speak up and help uncover any potential blind spots at your organization.

## 2. Demonstrate solidarity.

It's one thing to let employees know about the company's values; it's another to show solidarity with regular check-ins. Whether by email or phone, ask them how they're doing, and how you can further support them. Give them simple and easily accessible ways to connect; whether they're in the office or working from home. This will also help them feel included, and as mentioned earlier, give the sense of safety that can lead to greater collaboration.

## 3. Be proactive.

As we continue to navigate this new normal, stay vigilant on any changes in employee behavior. If an employee is acting differently or in a manner that's concerning, take additional time to connect with them and provide guidance or assistance as needed. Reiterate that these times are very difficult, that they are important to the organization and that you all have a shared purpose.

## 4. Create greater awareness throughout the organization.

Trust is more important than ever, so remember to be reliable and consistent in how you communicate. Take a position and stick with it, and to increase credibility, reference statistics to explain your position. Work with your business resource groups to offer educational webinars, or with learning and development leaders to share training.

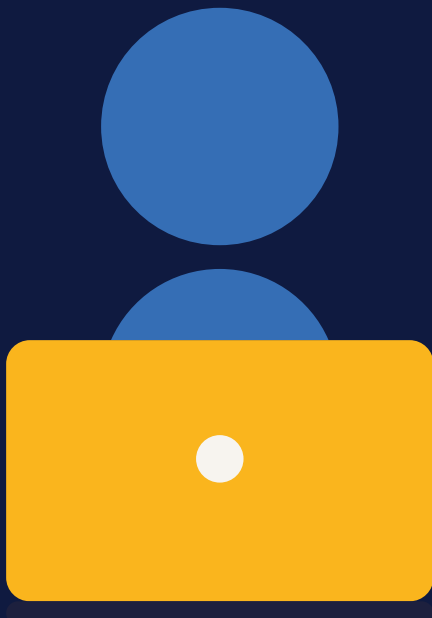
## 5. Be an ally.

Regardless of background, anyone and everyone can be an ally to marginalized and vulnerable groups. To be a true ally, speak up if and when you notice instances of inequality or bias in action. Don't be afraid to challenge your colleagues to think differently or hold them accountable for biased behaviors. Doing so will have a domino effect and encourage employees at all levels to do the same. Just as important is to continuously expand your own knowledge to further cultivate compassion and empathy.

## embrace change in uncertain times.

The past several months have brought about unprecedented change, disrupting business as usual. As we all continue to adapt to a new normal, it's important to ensure that building an inclusive workplace stays top of mind.

At a time when your diverse workforce is more isolated, stressed and unsure about the future, it's up to leadership to make everyone feel welcome, heard and able to contribute. As a leader, you have the power to help cultivate a more inclusive workplace that values different perspectives and experiences. Not only will this help foster collaboration, but it will also create a stronger workforce that can help advance company goals in the face of continued uncertainty.



Want to learn more about inclusive leadership during times of crisis?

[watch the educational webinar](#)

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