

# DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

## MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

Here are eight ways to create an inclusive team.

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**A**s the economic engines rev back up, it will take innovation and resilience — the overarching qualities of companies that focus on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) — to recover from the COVID-19 shutdown. Today, labor shortages are a real challenge, in part because the pandemic has changed what matters most, with many workers prioritizing flexibility and happiness, replacing the live-to-work mantra with work-to-live.

“A great resignation is underway. Pre-COVID-19, compensation, benefits and growth opportunities have traditionally been the

reason why people made career moves. Now, add flexibility and happiness. Diversity, equity and inclusion play a big role in how happy employees are at a company,” said Ren Akinci, Executive Vice President, People and Culture Officer, Emerald, who joined the company in March 2021 to expand and strengthen its diversity, equity and inclusion efforts.

“Inclusion starts at step one and removing hiring biases is critical. Equitable compensation and counteracting negotiating bias is imperative during the offer stage. The hiring manager and HR are responsible for ensuring the playing field is even for all people during the negotiation process and having a philosophy of equal pay for equal work,” Akinci added.



Experts agree that DEI is more critical than ever to a company's success and talent retention. "We live in a very diverse world of people who are multigenerational, multilingual, multiracial, have dual citizenships and much more," Karen Gonzales, CMP, IAEE Director of Partnership Relations and Staff Liaison, IAEE Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee, said.

Here are eight additional ways to start creating a more diverse culture.

## 1. Hiring STARS

An increasing number of organizations are committed to DEI as a transformational strategy to drive change, with many trade show companies, such as Emerald, leading with more diversity and inclusiveness, demonstrated by recently removing its college degree requirements from most of its open positions.

"Four-year degree screens put 60% of all workers in the U.S. on the outside looking in, especially as nearly three-quarters of job postings today demand a degree. And when you put up that arbitrary requirement, you are screening out nearly 70% of Black workers, nearly 80% of Hispanic workers and almost 75% of rural workers," said Julie Elberfeld, a senior advisor at Opportunity@Work, a nonprofit whose mission is to



Ren Akinci



Nancy Walsh

increase career opportunities for the more than 70 million adults in the United States without a four-year college degree, but who are Skilled Through Alternative Routes — and are often called "STAR" workers.

Emerald dropped traditional four-year degree requirements from at least 50% of its roles, recognizing the potential barrier.

"A degree should not be a disqualifier for an otherwise qualified candidate," Akinci said. "College is expensive and

the average student debt takes 10 years or more to pay off."

Recent jobs reports suggest an unequal recovery happening across education levels, gender and race. "To ensure we see an equitable recovery, it's vital we find ways to increase diversity in our ranks

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**Ren Akinci, Executive Vice President, People and Culture Officer, Emerald**

and build back a stronger economy for all — which means intentionally focusing on the populations too often excluded from hiring. Many companies express their intent to increase diversity and foster a culture of inclusion, but they need to start with hiring and internal mobility opportunities that are themselves inclusive, versus weeding out qualified workers before they get a chance to show what they can do," Elberfeld said.

## 2. Professional Development

DEI programs require ongoing effort, professional development is a must and companies with effective DEI programs achieve success by working at it.

Informa Markets, with a continued focus on creating balanced, inclusive environments for its team and its customers, recently partnered with Diversity Ally, diversity and inclusion specialists, to strengthen Informa Markets' DEI practices through the development of senior management and wider colleague training programs, and the provision of bespoke guidance and support to Informa Markets' colleague networks.

"The events industry is poised to be a model industry when it comes to demonstrating the multiple benefits of encouraging diversity and inclusion," Gabrielle Austen-Browne, Co-Founder, Diversity Ally, said.



### 3. Accountability

The best way to ensure your DEI efforts are making an impact is to make them accountable. But it's more than a numbers game. In addition to quantitative measures, DEI success should be measured qualitatively, in the behavioral changes that have led to cultural shifts and better satisfaction survey results.

### 4. Collaboration

A diverse workforce is often a collaborative one. Employees need to feel supported, recognized and able to trust that they are treated fairly by the organization, with everyone aware of their part in creating an inclusive and diverse workforce.

Fostering collaboration in a hybrid environment presents even more challenges. "How do we make sure those who are not in the office still feel included?" Akinci asks.

### 5. Action Plan

"It's great to have a mission statement on DEI, but you need an action plan that supports the statement, otherwise it's just communication and your employees will take notice," Akinci said. Data collection and analysis is an essential part of a successful DEI initiative. What does your workforce look like compared with the labor market? Are there any inequities based on demographics? Once data is collected, what areas seems underrepresented? What policies and practices need to be implemented in

### Three DEI Igniters

Dr. Doyin Atewologun, Chartered Business Psychologist & Director, Delta Alpha Psi, identifies three issues related to DEI that the pandemic brought to the forefront.

The first was the death of George Floyd that ignited a renewed racial justice movement. "With many professionals stuck at home, we experienced a collective hyper-focus on screens, making it difficult to avoid conversations as they relate to racial inclusion around us, and we saw many companies publicly commit to progress on racial equity," Atewologun said.

Second was the COVID-19 shutdown.

"Handling the loss of in-person contact and isolation in the middle of a global pandemic not seen in our lifetimes legitimized conversations about such issues as depression, loneliness and anxiety. Diverse personality and social/anxiety disorders are key facets of diversity and inclusion that historically would be under-reported and under-addressed in the workplace. This is a positive change," Atewologun explained.

Third is the collapse of the boundaries between work responsibilities and domestic duties revealed during the COVID-19 shutdown. "American data suggests that three major group of women experienced some of the largest challenges during the pandemic: working mothers, women in senior management positions and Black women," Atewologun said.

How can a company start to create a more diverse culture? Start where you are, advises Atewologun. Gather data that can speak to the diverse experiences in your organization that is both qualitative and quantitative across diversity dimensions, and is analyzed intersectionally.

However, even if you can't yet do this, don't let this stop you from doing the next thing, she said. Ensure leaders are visible role models of inclusive leadership that demonstrate a learning mindset, courage and accountability, and work toward being allies of groups to which they don't belong. Finally, leaders, managers and human resources should review everyday behavior and formal processes to see how bias may be getting in the way of creating inclusive cultures.



Dr. Doyin Atewologun



your organization to make sustainable change? Does your staff need to be trained on unconscious biases? Is your recruiting process inclusive? Do your job descriptions have gender-neutral words?

Nancy Walsh, Informa Markets President, North America, stresses the importance of acknowledgment and transparency, and an ongoing commitment to improvement.

“At Informa Markets, we defined four pillars to focus our efforts around: racial equality, gender equality, sexuality and identity equality, and accessibility,” Walsh said. “We established task forces around those, developed a budget, identified executive sponsors for each, and then encouraged passionate colleagues to join any they were interested in driving forward. It was a nice grassroots way to ensure the voices of our colleagues were heard, while also providing enough structure to ensure tangible actions were taken.”

With a Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer hired to ensure accountability for Informa’s progress, the company entered into a partnership with Diversity Ally to help further define those pillars.

## 6. Training and Resources

DEI training offers countless resources. “If there is no DEI point of contact within the team, hire a consultant to assist,” IAEE’s Gonzales recommends.

Emerald’s training is ongoing, and most recently, the company committed to provide unconscious bias and inclusive hiring best practices training to all its hiring managers, ensuring the best possible hires to support its growth.

Training doesn’t necessarily have to be expensive and some of Akinci’s recommendations include courses, such as edX, that open the classroom through online learning, empowering millions of learners in the process.

Another Akinci team resource is Better Allies: Everyday Actions to Create Inclusive, Engaging Workplaces. The “5 Ally Actions” Weekly Newsletter offers five simple actions to create a more inclusive workplace. “Our People & Culture team is subscribed, and we talk about the newsletter at our touch points. It is a way to build knowledge and get more comfortable talking about better allyship honestly, and where we are on our DEI goals,” Akinci said.

## 7. Top Down

Leadership buy-in is imperative. “You may hire amazing talent, but if they don’t see themselves represented in senior management, or have mentors who can help grow their career, you will lose them to companies that do,” Akinci said.



Julie Elberfeld



Karen Gonzales

“I am proud to say at Emerald over 50 percent of senior leadership, including executive leadership, are women.”

## 8. Have the Difficult Conversations That Deliver

Senior leaders have to be willing to make space and facilitate the conversation in the workplace and encourage individuals to safely share what they want to say.

Plus, collaboration is key. “We have building blocks in place on our path to ensuring inclusivity is woven into the fabric of how we manage our teams and engage with our communities, and I welcome any peers who are looking to launch similar programs to reach out,” adds Walsh.

**This is the first part of a multi-part series as TSE seeks to investigate and gather information in the field that serves our industry with the guidance from our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Task Force.**

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