

HR Insights

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Fostering Inclusivity in a Post-coronavirus Workplace

Diversity and inclusion in the workplace are not new concepts. However, as the threat of COVID-19 shifts, it's important for businesses to not simply have a plan, but fully embrace those concepts. People have gained new and varied perspectives while living through and preparing to emerge from the pandemic.

What Is Inclusion?

Although often used together, diversity and inclusion represent separate ideas. Diversity is the actual makeup of the business, including but not limited to age, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion and disabilities. Inclusion is how diversity is integrated.

The goal for business leaders is to make employees feel like they belong and can be themselves—both in virtual and face-to-face workplace settings.

Why Does It Matter?

The coronavirus pandemic has and continues to elevate disparities and highlight other challenges. For example, a subtler form of diversity is whether somebody is a parent or caregiver. No matter what the difference or situation is, business leaders should expand their empathy and compassion for employees as work-life challenges evolve.

There's a positive side of the pandemic as diversity is addressed in new ways with employees working from home. For example, those who may have trouble getting around the office due to physical limitations have been able to work from the comfort of their home.

When discussing employee well-being and engagement, diversity and inclusion should be a part of the conversation as well.

Making It the New Normal

If we've learned anything from social distancing and isolation, it's that humans are their best when connected and engaged with each other. The benefits of diversity and inclusion remain the same as they were before the coronavirus pandemic, but this is a good time to revisit business strategies.

Consider the following ways to promote diversity and inclusion with your workforce:

- **Get educated**—Employees and businesses should understand issues as fully as possible. Actively listen to understand differences and seek opportunities to expand your viewpoints. That knowledge will drive company approaches and policies.
- **Seek opportunities**—On a similar note as above, seek out opportunities to be with those who are different than yourself. A business could do this by expanding recruiting, selection and hiring. Personal growth begins once you're comfortable with being uncomfortable.
- **Invite people**—Multiple points of view are critical to developing inclusive policies. Consider including a diverse group of employees, regardless of role, in the decision-making process.



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- **Support employees**—Everyone has been affected differently by the pandemic. Touch base with all employees to find out about their work-from-home or home life situations to understand how you can be mindful of their challenges. That same attitude is equally important as employees return to the workplace. Two-way communication is critical.
- **Build trust**—People want to feel a sense of belonging and value in their communities, and that includes the workplace community. Leaders have a responsibility to build trust and acceptance, which will help create a safe environment for employees. Whether virtual or in person, leaders should ensure that everyone's voices are acknowledged and heard within the workplace.
- **Reevaluate performance**—Feedback, performance reviews, and pay evaluations should be analytical and driven by metrics. That helps remove any bias that may have driven those processes in an in-person work setting.

Everyone is called to step up, but it definitely starts at the top in the workplace. Inclusive leadership takes effort. While still being in control, it's important to show empathy and appreciation—and keep listening to and supporting the workforce.

Business leaders can use their power, platforms and resources to help employees feel heard and respected. Now, more than ever, employees need and deserve that in the workplace.

To learn more about inclusion in the workplace, contact Wallace Welch & Willingham today.