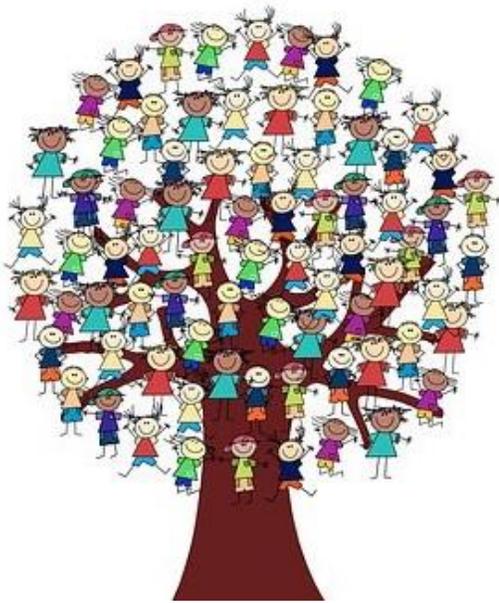


Building an Inclusive Business

By Ann N. Gatty, Ph.D.



Today, building an inclusive business environment is a core principle for any leader who wants to create a strong, competitive organization. An inclusive business provides respect and value for every employee regardless of nationality, race, gender, religion or sexual orientation. Inclusion is the deliberate act of welcoming diversity in an environment where everyone's voice can contribute to the organization's overarching purpose.

Building an inclusive business is a proactive approach which creates a workforce with increased job satisfaction and job sharing. There is no point in demonizing anyone for the past cultures they might have led which did not embrace diversity and inclusion. The point of this article is to share ways to make your business more inclusive and attractive to future hires.

Here are 4 easy strategies for building an inclusive business.

Host creative meetings

Everyone has attended boring, uneventful meetings; often with a few voices taking center stage. Other members sit silently, preoccupied with their mobile device. How can this scene be transformed? As the meeting host, create a written agenda and distribute it to all those who will be attending. Make certain that you have allowed enough time to cover the topics that are listed. By disseminating the agenda prior to the meeting, those individuals who are more introverted will have time to consider the topics and come to the meeting with their ideas. Otherwise, the extroverts would most likely overtake the conversation in the meeting.

As host, you set the ground rules for the meeting. You can require that time be given for everyone to speak and respond to comments using a round robin approach. Or you may limit the time that individuals can speak so that no one monopolizes the conversation. Do not allow people to talk over each other.

Make certain that people have comfortable, equal seating and are not relegated to back positions. When ideas are offered, give credit where credit is due. Such recognition is important for everyone to feel that they

are contributing and that their ideas are respected. You may find that if topics are complex, it is beneficial for attendees to write their ideas on paper during the meeting so that you can combine the perspectives to create a more well-crafted solution. Always start and end the meeting according to schedule so that you communicate that you value their time.

Inclusion is the deliberate act of welcoming diversity. Equal access to opportunities and a proactive mindset to bring people together.

Rethink performance reviews

The performance review should be a learning process that includes several meetings throughout the year, not simply one review on the employee anniversary date. This process allows for benchmarks to be set and monitored. Inclusive behavior can be emphasized as a goal. And adding 360-degree assessments to the process allows for multiple sources to comment on performance and reduces the likelihood of a biased review completed by one individual.

When completing the written reviews, be mindful of the language you are using, and consider possible reactions the person receiving the review may have. Avoid phrases and words that might offend or stereotype the person based on nationality, gender, age, race or sexual orientation. Again, the review should be encouraging for improvement, and the written tone should reflect that goal.

Create interest groups

One of the challenges for business organizations as they grow is that people interact mostly with the group of individuals with whom they have daily contact. They may not even know the names of other colleagues who work with the company but in different areas.

Several companies have found it useful to establish interest groups. These groups could focus on establishing volunteer efforts to support their community or raising funds for a social cause. Maybe there is interest in starting a book club, a garden club, etc. The purpose is to allow individuals to build friendships outside of their immediate circle of work colleagues.

Getting to know a broader group of individuals on a deeper level strengthens the woven fabric of the company. People who have friends at work are happier at work. Having an opportunity to interact with people of diverse backgrounds builds a stronger community of respect.



Solicit creative ideas

Are you aware that 80% of innovative ideas are introduced by your front-line employees? These are ideas to improve the way work is done, or to improve customer service, or to suggest a new product or service. Creative ideas come from the front line and then are adopted further up the org chart. Building an inclusive business can be enhanced by recognizing the individuals as they generate innovative ideas, and again recognize them when the ideas are implemented.

People want to know that they are contributing to an organization's success. Building an inclusive business provides every voice to be heard and everyone to matter.

About the Author

Dr. Ann Gatty is a business development strategist. She helps her clients clarify the vision for their businesses, boost their leadership capabilities and add quality talent to help the clients reach their goals. Through a collaborative mentoring process, she and her clients create workable strategic business plans and success initiatives, while improving their workplace processes. Dr. Gatty is a frequent writer and contributor www.AllBusiness.com, www.MarketingInsiders.com, and www.WomenOnBusiness.com. Her interactive speaking engagements assist participants in discovering new-found talents and skills that they can immediately apply in the workplace. Join her [Facebook Group, Strategic Thinking Summit Elites](#) for strategies you can implement to grow your business success and enjoy camaraderie with others entrepreneur members.