How Top Companies
Succeed at Diversity and Inclusion

By Kat Boogaard

themuse

The matter of diversity and inclusion in the workplace can inspire a lot of complex feelings.

You want to build a diverse team. You're eager to foster an environment where *everyone* at your company feels included and supported. But, you're not sure what, specifically, you can do to make a positive, productive impact.

You know it's about a lot more than just checking boxes or meeting a quota. You want to help cultivate inclusiveness and equality at your company. But, it's hard to know which resources and strategies actually work and are worth pursuing.

The truth is: Getting diversity and inclusion right isn't easy—and it's not something you can set and then forget. Making real progress is an ongoing endeavor that requires being self-aware, selfless, and forward-thinking.

Fortunately, we're sharing key lessons and insights from top companies to help you succeed with your own diversity and inclusion efforts.

More Than a Buzzword:
What Exactly Is Diversity and Inclusion?

Before we dig into the strategies, it's important to understand that while diversity and inclusion is often stated as a single phrase, the two words are actually two separate entities that need to come together to be effective.

Diversity means that there are a variety of backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences represented within your company. That includes people of different ethnicities, races, religions, genders (and gender identifications), sexual orientations, physical abilities, ages, educations, social classes, and beyond.
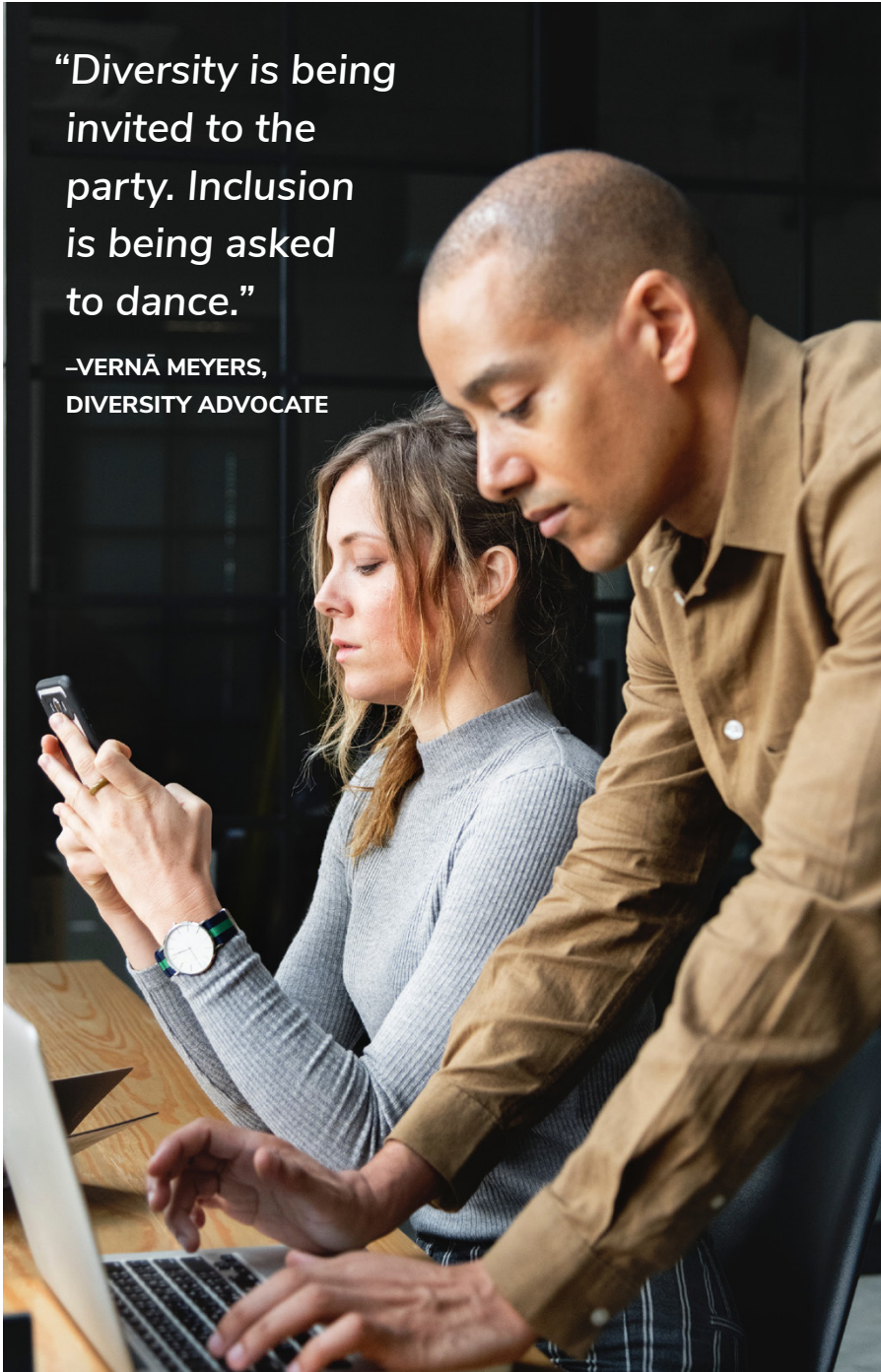
Inclusion, on the other hand, is much harder to quantify. It involves facilitating connections and cultivating organizational norms and behaviors that actively encourage your diverse team members to bring their whole selves to the office. It's the work you do to create a safe space and embrace what makes each person on your team unique.

As diversity advocate, Vernā Meyers, so eloquently **explains**, "Diversity is being invited to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance."

So, why are they so often paired together?

Put simply, diversity without inclusion doesn't actually solve the problem of people being left out.

You might put in the legwork to hire a diverse group of employees, and you might even be successful in doing so. But, without true inclusion, those employees won't feel supported in your work environment—which means they likely won't stick around long-term.

"Diversity is being invited to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance."

–VERNĀ MEYERS, DIVERSITY ADVOCATE

themuse

Why Diversity and Inclusion Seriously Matter

While an increasing number of employers are prioritizing awareness around how they hire talent and foster their team culture and behaviors, there are still companies out there that view diversity and inclusion as something they can tout at conferences or highlight in their employer branding materials.

But, diversity and inclusion has a lot more significance than simply keeping up appearances.

Let's start with the obvious: You don't want to build a culture where *anybody* feels excluded. Of course, that kind of environment is harmful in a lot of ways (not to mention it's just bad business). But, some studies also prove that feeling ostracized at work can actually be more detrimental to the physical and mental health of your employees than outright harassment.

Next, there's the fact that 64% of candidates say diversity and inclusion is an important factor in their decision to accept a job offer. It's something they actively look for in companies, which means diversity and inclusion are crucial for growing your workforce and attracting top talent.

There's also no discounting the benefit of a diverse team for the overall health and success of your organization.

Having different perspectives and fresh ideas present on your team constantly challenges you to think outside the box and avoid falling victim to groupthink—where everybody reaches a consensus without evaluating other viewpoints, simply because they want to avoid conflict and maintain harmony.

Make no mistake, the statistics are there to back this up. A study of 600 business decisions made by 200 different teams found that inclusive teams made better decisions up to 87% of the time. Even further, that same study showed that decisions that were made and executed by diverse teams delivered 60% better results.

Being pushed to think differently and make more thoughtful decisions leads to big things for a company—quite literally.

Decisions made and executed by diverse teams delivered

60%

better results

themuse

Lessons From the Experts: How You Can Succeed at Diversity and Inclusion

The benefits of having a diverse workforce and an inclusive culture are evident. But, that doesn't change the fact that figuring out how to succeed at diversity and inclusion within your own company can be a difficult challenge to tackle.

That's why we decided to engage in a candid conversation with some passionate and accomplished diversity and inclusion leaders about how they're breaking barriers and building empathy at their companies.

They shared plenty of valuable lessons and insightful anecdotes that you can learn from—and then apply the takeaways at your own organization.

ALEXANDRA CAVOULACOS
Founder & President of The Muse

TOBY HERVEY
CEO & Founder of Bravely

KELLIE WAGNER
Founder of DEI Collective

MITA MALLICK
Head of Diversity & Inclusion and Cross Cultural Marketing at Unilever

CHRISTENA J PYLE
Director of Diversity & Inclusion at Omnicom Group; Director, ADCOLOR

themuse

Building a Diverse Team

Here are a few strategies you can use to recruit and build a diverse team.

1. REMOVE BARRIERS FROM YOUR HIRING PROCESS

Unfortunately, it's easy to implement unnecessary limitations in your hiring process—without even intending to do so. Take a look at your job descriptions and reassess the requirements you have listed to ensure that you aren't unintentionally excluding candidates.

Alexandra Cavoulacos, Founder and President here at The Muse, gives the example of college degree requirements for certain roles. Many qualified, competent people could be interested in your open positions—but might automatically take themselves out of the running if they don't possess the right education.

"The easiest example is computer science," says Cavoulacos, "A lot of times it'll be advertised that somebody needs a bachelor's degree in computer science. But, if you ask the hiring manager, 'Well, they can code and have done it for 10 years— do they really need a bachelor's?' the answer is always 'no.' So, that doesn't *really* matter."

It's something that's better left out of the job description entirely because it's not necessarily a foolproof proxy for finding the right person for the role. "Those are the things that actually open up your applicant pool, and then you hire people where there's actually no *potential* versus *qualification* gap," Cavoulacos adds. "They can come in and be successful, they might just have a different profile."

2. RECRUIT IN THE RIGHT PLACES

While using platforms that you know have a diverse audience can be helpful (and is a good first step), it will still be challenging to *attract* a diverse pool of candidates if you're constantly rinsing and repeating your recruitment strategy.

Head out and actively recruit people at various events and conferences that are focused on diversity—like women in tech events, as just one example. Or, concentrate your hiring efforts on **gender-specific schools** or colleges that emphasize inclusivity in their programs.

themuse

Building a Diverse Team

You also can (and should!) lean on your existing employees for help. Ask them where they turned when they were actively job seeking—you might just discover new outlets that lead you to a varied group of candidates you haven't been reaching.

3. HAVE A DIVERSE HIRING PANEL

A diverse pool of applicants won't do much for you if you let unconscious bias creep into your hiring process—because whether you intend to or not, you'll likely eliminate the candidates who bring something different to the table.

It's human nature to gravitate toward people who are more like us. "Unconscious bias toward people who are of the same race, education level, economic status and have the same personality, fears, or values influences who you hire much more than you think," writes Kimberly Giles in an **article for Forbes**.

"You subconsciously look for points of similarity in everyone you meet because similarities make you feel safer."

Ensure that you have a varied group of people interviewing your candidates so that you don't end up building an entirely homogeneous team.

4. STANDARDIZE THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Another way to reduce bias in your hiring process is to standardize your interviews by asking all candidates the same list of questions or having them complete the same test assignments. Not only does this increase objectivity, but it can actually help you find the better fit for your open roles.

Numerous studies have shown that unstructured interviews—despite their perceived effectiveness by many managers—are incredibly lackluster at predicting on-the-job performance.

the**muse**

Emphasizing Inclusivity at Work

Remember: Building a diverse team is only the first step. You've invited people to the party, and now it's time to ask them to dance by fostering an inclusive culture that makes everybody feel equally welcomed and supported in your office.

1. TAKE SMALL STEPS IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Inclusivity is a movement—it's not something you can expect to happen overnight or to be initiated by any one person. You can't paste an inspirational slogan about inclusivity on your office wall and expect that to inspire major change.

Instead, it's important to recognize that a big change is really just a series of smaller changes building on one another to make meaningful progress.

"I think the most powerful people who practice diversity and inclusion don't have it in their title. You know, they say a leader in a room is the person that cares the most—so I think we all have an opportunity to be the leader," says Christena J. Pyle, Director of Diversity & Inclusion at Omnicom Group, and Director, ADCOLOR.

One example of a seemingly small effort that can have a big impact is encouraging your team members to list their preferred pronouns in their Slack profiles. This signals not only an awareness but also an acceptance of non-binary identities.

Another simple action you can take is to be extra mindful of what you say—even if it's something that might not seem obviously exclusive at first. Toby Hervey, CEO and Founder of Bravely, provides the example of being in a meeting and saying, "Let's take this offline," which can imply "some people in this room don't matter in this decision."

If you do need to have a follow-up conversation with a smaller group of people, Hervey suggests taking the time to communicate the "why" and explain the thought process behind how any further decisions will be made. "Thoughtfulness around small devices like that can make a huge difference in driving that sense of belonging and a two way decision-making process," he adds.

2. GET EXECUTIVE SPONSORSHIP FOR YOUR EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS

Making Employee Resource Groups available to your team is a great step in the right direction.

themuse

Emphasizing Inclusivity at Work

But, if you're looking to make your ERGs even more impactful, consider pursuing executive sponsorship for them—where a leader from your organization has some attachment to or involvement with that group.

Kellie Wagner, Founder of DEI Collective, recalls a former client who worked on the executive team of a well-known company where it was mandated that all executives had to be a sponsor of one of the ERGs. "He was a white, gay man and he thought, 'Oh yeah, I'm super committed to diversity,'" explains Wagner.

He was assigned to the ERG for women of color. "He said it was such a learning experience—he had no idea," Wagner continues.

"He thought he was pretty inclusive. He thought that he was really aware of the different experiences that people were having in the workplace. Being involved with that different population really opened his eyes in a new way and he became such an advocate—not just for women of color, but for other groups within the organization."

3. ASK EMPLOYEES WHAT THEY NEED

If you want to know how you can better support your employees, there's no need for a crystal ball. Just ask them what they need. Too often, inclusion efforts are made without a real understanding of what those employees want or require.

Mita Mallik, Head of Diversity and Inclusion and Cross Cultural Marketing at Unilever, offers the example of when they were setting up nursing rooms in the office. When she was presented with the design drawings, she—who's been a nursing mother before—immediately asked who had proposed the layout of the room.

"There was a group of men designing the room," she says. "I asked them, 'Have you ever nursed?' and they said, 'No, I've never nursed.' That's right—we need to go to the women's business resource group and ask

themuse
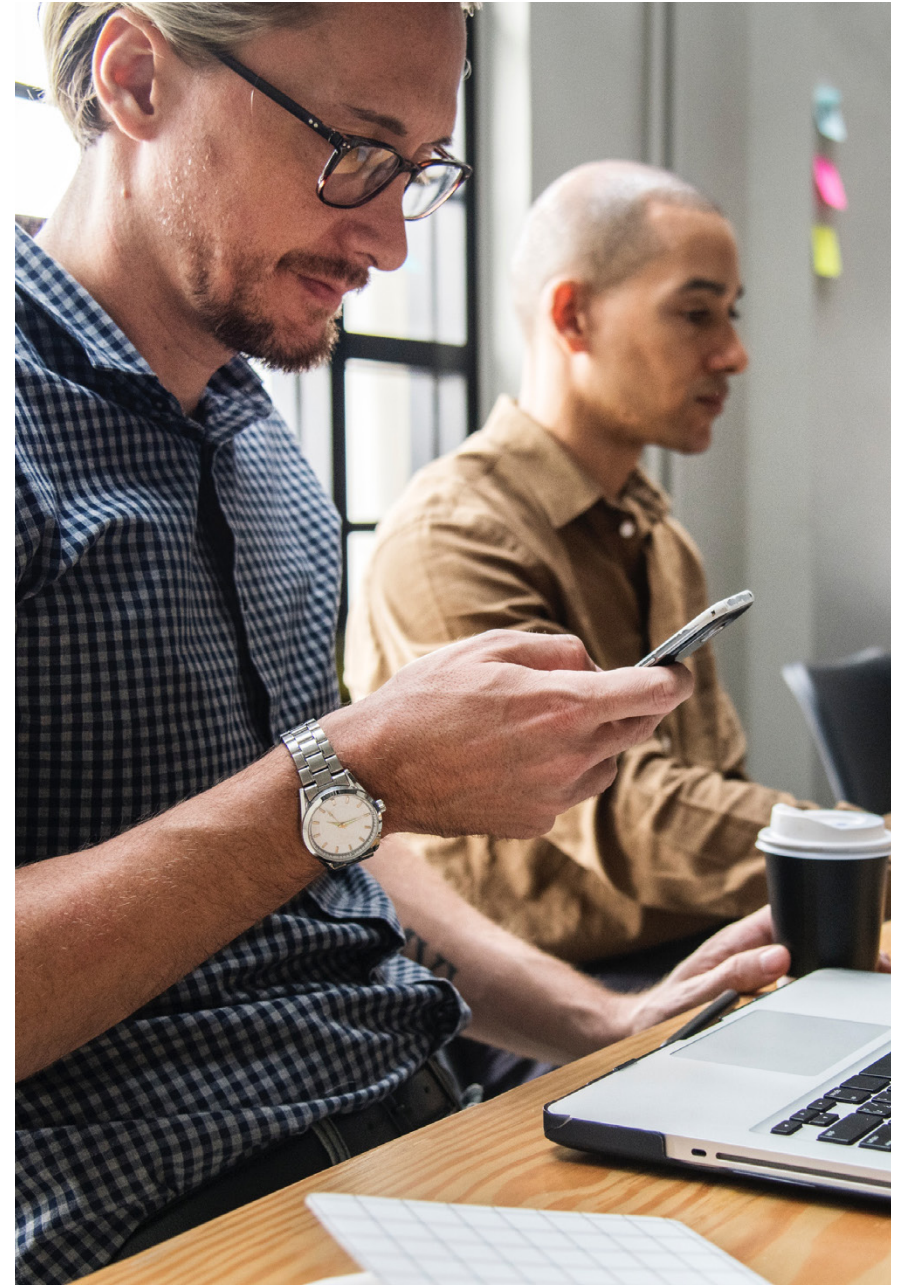
Emphasizing Inclusivity at Work

them, 'What would this room look like for the end user?'"

Doing so allowed them to put together rooms (complete with things like sinks, hospital-grade pumps, chargers, and comfortable working areas) that actually satisfied the needs of nursing mothers in their organization—rather than operating on assumptions.

It makes perfect sense. After all, as The Muse's Cavoulacos puts it, "You wouldn't launch a product without talking to your users, right? You make sure you understand them, what they need, you make trade-offs, figure out what's doable. It's exactly the same thing with policies inside of companies."

4. WEAVE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION INTO YOUR OKRS

"I think so often diversity and inclusion goals are this second stream of goals," explains Wagner. "They're separate from the business objectives."

There's a true business case to be made for the importance of diversity and inclusion. So, if you're struggling to get leadership engaged and on board with these initiatives, take a tactical approach and lead with facts and data.

"There are tons of studies that show inclusive teams perform better," says Hervey. "Engagement drives performance, and a sense of belonging drives engagement. The causation is very clear and there's plenty of research to back that up."

But, getting these initiatives rolling in your workplace is only half the battle—you also need to remain invested in what you're trying to achieve. Because of this, Wagner also urges companies to create an increased level of accountability and urgency by weaving diversity and inclusion into their objectives and key results (OKRs).

"People will do stuff that they are getting measured on," she explains. "So, if you can say 'every manager is responsible for these metrics around employee belonging and diversity of a team', all of a sudden it's a priority. Sometimes that's what it takes for people to get there."

themuse

Prioritizing Diversity and Inclusion

There's no way around it: Diversity and inclusion are undeniably important for a thriving team, a positive company culture, and a successful organization.

But, it's also a sensitive topic—and getting it right can be challenging. Fortunately, these strategies and lessons from diversity and inclusion experts can help.

Remember that knowledge without action is only knowledge. It's up to you to take this advice and then act on it at your own workplace in order to join the ranks of companies who truly succeed at diversity and inclusion.

themuse

The Muse

The Muse is the go-to destination for the next-gen workforce to research companies and careers. More than 75 million people each year trust The Muse to help them win at work, from professional advancement and skills-building to finding a job. Organizations use its platform to attract and hire talent by providing an authentic look at company culture, workplace, and values through the stories of their employees.

LEARN MORE

Website
themuse.com/employers

Email
sales@themuse.com

themuse