10 ways to be a more inclusive leader

Being an inclusive leader has multiple benefits, from cultivating better trust within your team to generating better performance. We wanted to highlight 10 ways you can be a more inclusive leader, with some tangible tips you can use on a day-to-day basis!

❶ CREATE A CULTURE OF RESPECT WITHIN YOUR TEAM

Creating a fair and empowering working environment requires for you to be observant of not only how you treat people, but how individuals in the team treat each other. Identifying unconscious bias within yourself and others can be a good first step to take.

Here's an exercise you can try when running a meeting:

Who talks first in a group session?
Who is interrupted and by whom?
Is credit given appropriately for the work some-one has done or the ideas they have shared?
Who is being listened to the most?
Who is being listened to the least?
Who corrects others?

Gathering this information over a series of meetings/interactions can enable you to build a better picture of team dynamics, as well as underlying privilege and unconscious bias among team members.

❷ FEEDBACK

Feedback is the best tool you can possess. Try to gather it real-time, or if you are in the early stages anonymously can also work well, too.

Here is an exercise you can try:

Below are four questions you can ask your team either in a group setting or one-on-one basis. These questions will be used to gather feedback on your management style, specifically how you give feedback to your team.

Consider the ways that I currently give you feedback, what should I START, STOP or CONTINUE doing?
START: **STOP:** **CONTINUE:**
How do you like to receive feedback?
How would you like to provide feedback for me?
Consider our current peer feedback norms, what works well and what could be improved?

Once you have finished the exercise, make sure to thank the individuals and reinforce how much you appreciate the feedback. It's crucial to not be defensive or provide any further comment once you've received the answers, use this as a fact-gathering exercise. You can then use these answers to improve how feedback is viewed - both giving and receiving feedback as a leader.

③ ENCOURAGE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR EACH-OTHER

Healthy accountability can create a fairer working environment for all. A great starting point is encouraging team members to keep you accountable and showing them what that looks like. Setting healthy boundaries for accountability exemplifies to team members how they should treat each other, too.

A great way to start doing this is by doing what you say you're going to do. It's simple, but failing to follow through with actions, especially if they have been requested by your team, can create resentment and distrust.

You can start doing this at the beginning of each week with your team in a group setting, and putting the actions on a to-do list that is visible to everybody. More personal actions (let's say after a one-to-one) can be summarized in an email and sent to your team member explaining to them what you'll be doing and when it will be delivered.

④ ASK FOR NEW PERSPECTIVES
Especially from those who don't contribute often

Using the information you've gathered from point #1, can help you to encourage new perspectives and exemplify the importance of contribution from all team members. It also highlights that you value everyone's input, regardless of how much they voluntarily contribute.

To keep yourself accountable for doing this, create a tally of who contributes the most in the meeting and use this information to encourage anyone not contributing to share their perspectives. Don't forget to ask how you can support them to raise their voice!

Setting the expectation at the beginning of each meeting that you require everyone to contribute will quickly establish a norm, encourage accountability and reinforce that every voice is valuable and welcomed.

⑤ PRIORITIZE 1:1 TIME

Although group meetings and settings are collaborative and important, regular 1:1 time can help to form better trust, and also create a sense of belonging.

⑥ LOOK FOR CULTURE ADD
Instead of culture fit

When hiring, focus on finding individuals who will add value to your culture, instead of fitting the current mold. This will not only allow you to create more diversity within your team, but also reduce the risk of creating a homogeneous workforce and stagnant culture.

⑦ PRIORITIZE ACCURATE REMUNERATION/EVALUATE REWARDS STRUCTURES

If you haven't already, regularly check that individuals in your team are being remunerated correctly. Another way of measuring this is by speaking to everybody on a one-on-one basis and getting their opinions on the current incentives in place and what you can do to make it more inclusive.

You can try these questions:

What do you enjoy about our current incentives?
How inclusive do you think our incentives are and why?
What behaviors and activities do you think we should reward and incentivize?
What suggestions would you have to improve our current incentives?

Again, this requires you to simply gather feedback, and thank them for their input. You can then use this information to either create unique incentives for your team, as well as also feed this information back to the wider leadership team.

⑧ EDUCATE YOURSELF!

Being inclusive requires you to work on yourself and your leadership style. If you're receiving feedback, work on it and educate yourself to be better in a specific area. For example, let's say your team is made up of 50% native English speakers and 50% non-native English speakers.

What do you think may help them to perform better at work? Is it more visual aids in meetings? Is it working on your delivery if you speak too quickly? Instead of relying on your team to give you the answers, be proactive in educating yourself on how you can be better.

⑨ GET PERSONAL
Little things make a big difference

With Diversity and Inclusion, it isn't necessarily a glossy, heavily funded initiative that will make a tangible difference within a team. It's usually the small, personal things that have an impact. For example, birthdays, notable holidays, and personal touches can help you to form a better bond with your team members.

Some ways you can start to get personal are as follows:

- Make a note of everyone's birthday and organize a card, small gift and team lunch

- Celebrate notable holidays, not just standard national holidays. This will be different from person to person, so make sure you ask

- Organize a monthly lunch

⑩ TREAT EVERYONE EQUITABLY INSTEAD OF EQUALLY

As a leader, you should strive to treat everybody equitably over equally, because not everybody in your team will have the same, shared experience, nor will they be on equal playing fields.

For example, let's say you have two people in your team. One is from the USA and their native language is English, however, the other person in your team moved to the USA five years ago from Argentina. Their English is fluent; however, they will need different treatment from a development standpoint so they can be on an equitable playing field.

You may need to spend more time with the Argentinian employee on their commercial skills or even communication skills so they can adapt and learn more about the language, thus equipping them equitably rather than equally.

Inclusive leadership isn't about preferential treatment or softening your approach, it's about recognizing what the barriers may be to your teams' development and adjusting your management style accordingly - **without compromising the foundations of who you are!**

With the exercise below, focus on one or two things first per person so as not to overwhelm yourself.

- Team member

- What challenges is this individual facing?

- What opportunities does this present to support their development?

Bonus tip!
LEAD WITH EMPATHY

Leading with empathy takes time to do, but if you can actively take the time, you will reap the rewards. A great way to start showing vulnerability is by talking about personal failures with the team in the context of learning opportunities. This enables you to start role modeling early on, and also demonstrates that it's okay not to get it right every time.

Other ways you can show vulnerability and lead with empathy is by admitting when you don't know something, and also being open to taking risks (even if the outcome isn't necessarily going to be positive). Showing that you aren't the "finished article" humanizes you, especially to junior employees or people who have just joined your team.