What inclusive leaders do well

There is an army of research that proves the benefits of diversity to enhancing business innovation, employee engagement, trust, collaboration and increased discretionary effort.

In Australia, diverse employees working in inclusive teams report that they are;
- 10 times more effective
- 9 times more likely to innovate
  5 times more likely to provide excellent customer service **(Diversity Council Australia Research 2017)**

Yet, in many organisations that actively champion diversity and inclusion, feedback indicates that employees aren't always certain that they are operating in a 'safe to fail' environment where taking risks on new ideas, bringing their whole selves to work and challenging the status quo are welcomed or accepted.

And those ingredients are essential for any modern organization that needs to solve problems, change and be innovative, especially in the increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world we are operating in.

In fact, the progress of Australian companies in achieving diverse and inclusive workforces remains lacklustre despite the huge focus on making diversity programs a key strategic priority over the last 15 years.

Did you know that Australia's top 200 ASX-listed companies are more likely to be led or chaired by a man named Peter than a woman, that men are paid almost 14 per cent (on average) more than women, 44% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees regularly report hearing racial slurs in the workplace, almost 1 in 5 Australians aged between 15-24 with a disability have experienced some form of discrimination or that 42% of women experience gender discrimination at work?

There is a mounting body of evidence, reinforced in recent years by Google's research on the secret ingredients to high-performing teams, **(New York Times 2016)**

which indicates that creating an inclusive team environment where innovation and collaboration can thrive requires three key things;

1. That employees feel safe to take interpersonal risks without retribution (psychological safety);
2. That they feel genuinely included; and
3. That they feel that their individual uniqueness is both valued and respected.

So what do leaders who are proven to be inclusive do to create an environment that embraces diversity.

It really is dependent on three key things;

1. **Knowledge and awareness**: having a good understanding and awareness of unconscious bias and how that can impact on their ability to be inclusive of difference. With this knowledge they can then arm themselves with tools and processes that help mitigate the impact of their biases in leading teams and people.
2. **Inclusive Mindset:** Inclusive leaders have an open mindset which means that they are not set in their thinking and embrace discomfort as an opportunity for learning and growth
3. **Inclusive traits & behaviours -** Inclusive leaders master traits that encourage inclusive behaviours including authenticity, emotional resilience, self-assurance, inquisitiveness & flexibility
4. **Inclusive Disciplines** – they also have key leadership disciplines that enable them to optimise the diversity of their people including the ability to build interpersonal trust, integrating diverse perspectives, optimising talent, applying an adaptive mindset and achieving transformation through a willingness to confront difficult topics. **(Korn Ferry: The 5 Disciplines of Inclusive Leaders. Unleashing the Power of all of us 2020).**

Our REACH Inclusive Leadership Program focusses on helping leaders get a better understanding of the unconscious biases that might be holding them back from embracing diverse people and perspectives and builds capability and knowledge of how to harness the traits, behaviours and disciplines of Inclusive Leaders.

We achieve great results by focussing on making small but powerful tweaks to leadership practices, through building self-awareness of self-limiting behaviours and beliefs and demonstrating that it is often the small things that we are not doing as leaders that make the biggest difference to whether team members feel included.