

How about we stop letting other people define the work?

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Expert Forum



Most of the few posts I have managed this year have been focused on language. I think that language is one of the most powerful and one of the most overlooked tools at our disposal. A fair amount of the resistance that I meet in the workplace relative to Diversity and Inclusion work is not actually about the work that I do...t is about what someone else thinks I do. Or why I do it. Or how I do it.

This is one of the reasons that I keep going back to the line from Switch; *“What looks like resistance is often a lack of clarity.”*

There is resistance to this work, this is actually a body of work that can reward you with death threats in 2016.

But much more than that, I believe we have a lot of folks who are simply confused as to what this work is about. Folks commonly think that inclusion requires a lowering of standards (and this is what implicit bias looks like), when in fact inclusion demands a higher level of commitment to existing standards.

What we are advocating for with inclusion is a free market, a more competitive market for ideas, talent and contribution, and I am reminded of something that I came across recently from Iris Bohnet relative to competition in the workplace. *“I understand that increased competition can be painful, but I am too much of an economist to not believe in the value of competition. There is no evidence that protectionism has served the world well.”*

A lot of people think that this work is altogether something different though, they believe it to be about something far removed from what it is actually about. I remember a series of sessions that I did with power linemen in Tennessee, as they filled the training room they let me know that they were excited for their annual etiquette class and for me to teach them how to be kinder, gentler power linemen. I might not be able to pass an etiquette class let alone teach one, but that was their expectation.

Regardless of the work at hand, having clear, concise, common language is probably the most valuable thing that you can do. Look now at what your organization says regarding Diversity and Inclusion. Are there in fact clear and concise definitions for the key words used? Or is there a warm, fuzzy, rambling collection of really nice words that sound delightful but do not actually mean anything? Start there.

The way to change the paradigm in your organization regarding this set of issues requires changing the narrative. An effective narrative is informed by solid logic and a solid logic is informed by clear and concise terms.

Be good to each other.