One of my last presentations in 2011, was the closing keynote at the Workforce Diversity Network **Power of Inclusion Conference**. My message was about *next practices*, the areas where we need to focus our efforts to keep moving this body of work forward and I focused on 5 key opportunities.

1 - Clarity and Consistency

I think that language is supremely important.
Regardless of what the topic is, I think it is difficult for us to have conversations that are meaningful and actionable if there is not a common and consistent language in place to inform that conversation. The word "diversity" makes an easy example; a word that means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. To some people it is a beautiful and positive thing; to others it a negative or contrived thing, and to some it is an abstract and conceptual thing. To some people diversity means race relations, gender or sexual orientation. To some it means compliance, tolerance, sensitivity or political correctness.

The meaning that someone gives to a word plays a big role in determining how they feel about it, and in how they engage in conversations or learning opportunities around that topic.

And, unfortunately, a lot of people are now abandoning the word diversity. I hear more and more business leaders, HR professionals and even D&I practitioners saying "we do not really use the word diversity any more, we just talk about inclusion...diversity generates such a negative response."
We should not be allowing our detractors to determine the terms or boundaries of our work, we should not be allowing resistance to limit our language, and we should not be abandoning this word. We should be taking better care of it. As caretakers for this craft, we are called to bring greater clarity and consistency to the language and logic at the foundation of our work.

Clarity and consistency of language may sound like a small thing, but I see this as one of the biggest barriers to moving our work forward. As Chip and Dan Heath say in their book Switch, "what looks like resistance is often a lack of clarity."

The true and organic power of this work exists in the language and logic that it is built upon. If we do not care well for our language everything that we do is at risk.

2 - An Accurate Understanding of Human Beings

There are some large and overlapping bodies of work struggling greatly for relevance and impact as the world of work evolves and becomes more complex and volatile. The robust intersection of psychology (study of the human mind and behavior) and neuroscience (study of the anatomy and physiology of the brain) may very well light the way forward. Human resources, management, diversity & inclusion, leadership, organizational development and some adjacent fields all revolve chiefly around the human being, and we are now starting to realize that these disciplines are built on antiqued and inaccurate understandings of human beings and what drives human behavior.

We now know a lot more than we did 50 years ago, even than we did ten years ago about human behavior. Unfortunately, this information has not yet found its way into the field or to the toolkit of the practitioner. Fields of study such as behavioral neuroscience, cognitive neuroscience, cultural neuroscience, social neuroscience, behavioral economics, social cognition and social psychology have all benefited from advances in technology, especially imaging technology that allows us to watch the brain at work as it responds to words, images, social situations and other stimuli.

Our new insights into how the brain works, what some of its organizing principles are, what it is good at, what it is not good at and why we have some of the blind spots that we do, provide us a greater grasp on the significance of things like empathy, autonomy, certainty, relatedness, relationships, culture and how these things push on our behavior.

This information seems to have broad relevance for the evolving world of work, but seems to have special relevance to diversity and inclusion work. An inordinate amount of our focus as practitioners and champions has been related to intentions. Our message, at times implicitly at times explicitly, has been about being good to other people, especially people that are different by race, gender, ethnicity, etc. This is why conversations about diversity and inclusion continue to be heavily peppered with words like compassion, respect, tolerance, and sensitivity.

There is nothing wrong with any of these things, but it is all centered on our conscious and intentional decision making. And we now know that there are a whole bunch of variables influencing the decisions we make about other people, conscious intentions being just one. While it certainly requires some very real intention and some very real choices to do something hateful towards another person, it does not require any bad intentions, ignorance or hatred for our judgments of others and our interpretations of their behavior to be skewed by things like race, age, gender, etc.

Automatic and unconscious processing, stereotypes, assumptions, attribution

errors and cognitive biases are not subject to our intentions and aspirations. They are a product of how the human brain processes information and how we find our way around this big noisy planet.

Diversity and inclusion is about much more than simply having good intentions, human social behavior is far more complex than that and we need to do a better job of disentangling intentions from outcomes.

3 - Cognitive Diversity

Of increasing significance and value to our organizations is the ability to leverage diversity of thought, or cognitive diversity. Despite its growing importance, it is yet to show up "on the radar" in most organizations. It is not yet a part of the diversity and inclusion conversation, it is also not being included in considerations of talent, leadership, culture, innovation or any of the other issues it has relevance to. This is costly to the point of verging on recklessness. Decision making is an incredibly important thing that we do in our organizations, associations and communities. Problem solving is becoming a really important capacity. Innovation is the new competitive advantage. And though business leaders seem quick to talk about the importance of innovation and creative problem solving, they seem to not understand or care for the messy chemistry that feeds these things. One of the critical ingredients in quality decision making, solution generation and innovation is the intersection of different ideas, different perspectives, heuristics and experiences.

We need to make cognitive diversity a core part of our message moving forward.

I am not suggesting that identity diversity is no longer important or deserving of our attention...I am not suggesting that at all. I think that ethnicity, gender, race and other aspects of our identities play a significant role in our experiences of the organizational, community and national cultures that we swim in.

Additionally, identity plays a role in informing our cognitive orientation. Who I am, where I come from, how I am educated; these are all things that can shape my mental orientation. Cognitive diversity (differences in how we think) is a different kind of difference than identity diversity (differences in who we are), but there is considerable overlap and interplay between the two.

I see cognitive diversity as another valuable part of the diversity and inclusion conversation. It links pretty directly to things that business leaders take seriously (decision making, problem solving and innovation) and provides another point of access to the larger body of work.

4 - New Tools

People all around the planet are leveraging the power of social technology to create new kinds of communities, change the ways in which we share information and other resources, and overthrow oppressive governments; yet somehow we seem to have our nose up in the air about integrating these tools into the work that we do.

Diversity and inclusion work is very relational by nature…it has a great deal to do with who is in relationship with who and what the nature of those relationships is. Social technology is also relational. There are some natural and profound parallels between these two domains. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, blogging and other similar tools allow us to seek out more intersections of difference, cross boundaries in developing new relationships, further democratize the way that we organize work and make decisions, and bring additional transparency and access to policy and process. These are not small things.

As I look around our discipline, I feel like we have decided that new social technologies are simply not serious considerations for our work. This makes no sense to me. I would go so far as to suggest that if the D&I craft was the robust and vibrant source of social innovation that it could and should be, we would have invented this stuff. It is that incredibly relevant and applicable to our work. These are the biggest power tools that we currently have access to for our work.

We must aggressively begin implementing social technology, social network analysis and more democratic social methodologies (appreciative inquiry, open space technology, dialogue circles, etc.) into our work. We need less formal, traditional training, less focus on compliance, less linear measurement; and more collective inquiry, network architecting, diffusion of power and experimentation.

5 - Authenticity

An often overlooked, but important antecedent of diversity and inclusion is individual authenticity. Diversity (or difference) is a natural product of authentic human beings interacting. If we sincerely want to be about moving diversity and inclusion work forward it makes a great deal of sense to start by creating social spaces and cultures that invite and reward authentic, whole and unique human beings. *Who* we hire starts to lose its significance if they have to truncate their identities to fit in at work…we are just building clone armies.

Social pressure is a beast, and the workplace is full of it. Organizations are naturally conformist, and as diversity and inclusion practitioners we are called to

vigilance in keeping this conformity in check.

A lot has changed about the world of work. How we organize work, how we communicate, how we create value has changed and continues to change. While so much has changed about work, our models of the organization and of management remain largely unchanged. These models are oriented towards efficiency, reducing risk, control, predictability, uniformity and conformity.

The price of this conformity has gone up, as it compromises an organizations ability to benefit from the local perspective, to invite new information and ideas, to diffuse ideas and information, and to make decisions based on fact rather than fiction.

We must not advocate a false harmony, but rather stoke the fire of contained and functional conflict…this is how we actually use the knowledge and experiences and perspectives of the people on the payroll. We must relentlessly seek out and protect space for self expression, for shared inquiry, for choice, and for increased autonomy.