

Time to get started?

By Joe Gerstandt



Expert Forum



I am hopeful.

I feel like there is a new momentum gathering behind this work.

Maybe it is time to get started?

With the actual work of inclusion, that is.

I know, I know...

This may bring about a certain amount of psychological pain for some, exhausted by the mere mention of this work. There seems to be some strange underlying belief that this is work that a) need only be discussed one or twice, and b) mentioning it is the same thing as grasping it and/or doing it. While we can talk about leadership, or engagement, or branding, or innovation all day, every day, on every blog across the internet, the mere mention of diversity and inclusion still provokes the gnashing of teeth and pooping of pants.

Our workforces and communities do continue to get increasingly diverse, we just have not yet done much in the way of making sure that the places where we work and live are inclusive.

I am excited though, I am hopeful. More hopeful than I have been in a long while. It seems to me that more and more people and organizations are ready to get to work. I see encouraging signs.

The narrative around these issues continues to evolve and grow. The conversations regarding diversity in Hollywood, Silicon Valley and Washington D.C. are getting louder and louder. When I started blogging and being active on social media 8-9 years ago there were very few blogs about diversity and inclusion, even within the H.R. / leadership & organizational development / talent spaces. That is no longer true. Not only are there more folks talking specifically about these issues online, these issues are showing up in so many other spaces as well.

I was almost run out of some online conversations in the talent space years ago for injecting thoughts about diversity and bias, and today there are frequently articles written by leaders in those spaces about how fundamental diversity is to an actual commitment to talent, and about how implicit bias can easily compromise talent practices.

The first time I spoke at SxSW, I was on a panel specifically focused on diversity with three others. There was little else on the SxSW agenda that year (and SxSW has a huge agenda) that was specifically about diversity or inclusion. The last time that I spoke at SxSW, there were numerous sessions focused specifically on diversity and inclusion and I saw diversity and inclusion issues come up in many conversations not focused there. I am excited.

I am not suggesting that we are on the home stretch. Remember, I am excited that we might actually be ready *to get started*. There is still real resistance to this work. Some of that resistance is public and lives in the light of day where it can be engaged and

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deliberated with it. You may have some of those auto-responders in your life...folks who respond to any mention of diversity with “I’m all for diversity, but...”

Much of the actual resistance to this work does not live in the light of day, and sometimes must merely be survived. This is work that in 2016 still provokes implicit and explicit threats.

Bigger than the resistance is the body of folks who are convinced that this work has nothing to do with them, their family, their organizations, institutions or community. While I do feel that a shift in mind-set is happening, this work continues to be poorly understood and commonly misunderstood. I know of no other issues around which there is so much confusion in the workplace.

It is pretty easy to find leaders and organizations that speak loudly and proudly of how inclusive they are today that cannot explain what that actually means. That kind of sums of that state of things right now.

Are you ready to get started?

Be good to each other.