

## Where shall we go from here? The Future of Diversity and Inclusion.

By Joe Gerstandt



Expert Forum



10 years ago, I did quite a bit of “101” stuff. I did a lot of presentations on what diversity and inclusion mean for the workplace of today, and a lot of making the business case. I do very little of that today, and much more regularly am interacting with leaders and organizations that are wanting “...so *what do we do?*” kinds of messages.

Which is awesome. The corporate orientation toward D&I has changed, and is continuing to change. I think that we are going to see even greater change in the next decade, as more and more organizations come to realize how easily difference can become a barrier to participation, and how wasteful they currently are of the ability and potential that they have access to.

I am excited for the future.

This week I got to speak a bit about the future at the SHRM Annual Conference, which is easily the biggest Human Resources conference that I speak at on a regular basis. One of my sessions was “**The Future of Diversity and Inclusion: 5 Next Practices,**” and I think they dug it.

I have tried to identify some practices that I think are: 1) far from main stream (there are spaces and places where you can find folks doing these things, but they are not typical or standard efforts), 2) have the potential to provoke real cultural change, and 3) are applicable across industry, geography, size or kind of organization. There are 8-10 practices that I have been experimenting with, but I spoke to 5 of them this week.

1. **Language & Logic:** The organizational diversity & inclusion paradigm is still in its infancy, and while many more leaders are saying nice things about it today, they still cannot explain it. If you cannot explain it in a fairly simple way (whether you are talking about inclusion, innovation, engagement, or organizational culture), I don't think you are probably doing it. Language is the foundation, before you start to roll out programs, get your language right. What does diversity mean in your organization? What does inclusion mean? Clear, concise definitions. Simple definitions. When you get real clarity on what these words mean to you, what to do about it becomes a bit more obvious.
2. **Authenticity:** As how we create value continues to change, conformity and assimilation become increasingly wasteful. Our organizations need much more in the way of novelty, uniqueness, dissent and experimentation than they did just 20-30 years ago. Part of how we get there is a larger commitment to individual authenticity. Whole, authentic human beings is what we should be trying to include.
3. **Decision – Making:** Having started to pay a lot of attention to both the importance of decision-making and how we do it has brought me to believe this is a huge opportunity. Decision-making is really important and most organizations have put more thought into their dress code than they have put into how they make decisions. A diversity of perspectives and the ability to have constructive conflict

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are at the heart of healthy group process and in my experience, we are falling far short in this area.

4. **Relational Networks:** Who knows who matters, I think it matters a lot. Information, trust, inspiration and influence often travel through the informal networks of relationships in a workplace, rather than in accordance with the formal organizational chart. These informal networks often tend to be quite siloed and segregated. A little bit of social architecting will provide a more inclusive work experience and comes with additional benefits as well.
5. **Behavioral Science:** One of my concerns about the world of work (and especially H.R.) is that we continue to make a lot of decisions about humans without knowing much about them. One example of this is our approach to bias. We continue clinging to the idea that bias is something that “bad people” have. This undermines a great deal of what is done in the name of D&I and has us all trying to point out “bad people,” rather than doing our own work. A certain amount of bias is a natural, everyday part of the human experience and has nothing to do with choices or intentions. Understanding this allows us to do something about it, rather than continuing to be constrained by people practices that are naturally riddled with bias.

**Be good to each other.**