

A Guide to Creating an Open Minded Culture

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Introduction

Building meaningful and effective diversity and inclusion measures into your hiring process seems to be a constant struggle. In an ideal world a seamless recruiting process would be built on a bedrock of training to understand unconscious bias, the dangers of covering and the *why* of diversity and inclusion.

SocialTalent has distilled these lessons into this ebook to help hiring managers (and everyone working within the recruitment industry) implement real change that can help not only those in the talent business, but every level of the company.



Why is it so difficult to implement effective Diversity and Inclusion measures?

First things first, why it is so difficult!?

Your diversity hiring efforts are probably being thwarted by other aspects of the hiring process – perhaps the interviewer lacks certain skills and makes judgements on the candidate without evidence.

The others on the interviewing team are there to make a “culture fit” judgement only, and their criteria are not only unrelated to job performance but possibly illegal... There must be something you can do in recruiting to make a meaningful impact on our diversity goals?

At SocialTalent we have a couple of favourite taglines from the guru John Vlastelica. For this case it's a toss-up between “*Misalignment is the root of all evil*” and “*Try harder is not a strategy*”.

Recruiters are the gateway for whether or not organisations will succeed – will we meet our quota, will we build and scale our product, will we invent the next big thing? None of these things happen without having the best people, and recruiters are the ones who recruit the best. It's critical that hiring managers own their part of the process and enable recruiters to find the best talent pool they can.

Hiring managers and recruiters can do the business a disservice by allowing misalignment to fester, and by just trying to do more things instead of fundamentally changing how we do our work, in order to deliver better results.

Hiring managers need to act and be Talent Advisors, which means we need to lead the recruiting process, and along the way, develop a culture of recruiting at our company.

When it comes to diversity, we need to navigate the reasons outlined below and ensure that they're not allowed to continue in our hiring processes. We need to lead, call out instances of bias and negative practices as they happen.

So what are the barriers to our success?

Problem 1: Poor definition of “Diversity”

Often, companies will have goal within to ensure we have diversity throughout our organisation – perhaps its a very specific aim, like 1% of our employee population to be those with disabilities; 30% of our senior leadership to be female; graduate hires to be 50:50 gender balanced. The issue with this type of

38%

When surveyed **38%** of people believed that individuals have the most impact on diversity and inclusion.



goal is that our hiring decisions are influenced by factors that are not job-related, and in many (most) jurisdictions, this is discrimination.

What actually matters to the job performance of an employee is very often team skill capability. Are you hiring to add or replace a member of a team? Well then, what skills are that team lacking? Those skills and knowledge become your hiring criteria. You want the team to be as capable as possible, so simply hiring people similar to the others already on the team will ultimately be useless.

As a hiring manager, you need to lead by designing the hiring criteria with the recruiter. Allow yourself to be challenged on your criteria, and influence your must-have criteria by ensuring that the hiring bar any candidate must reach includes skills that the team currently lack.

You want the team to gain skills and knowledge with each person you add to the team. Make hiring decisions based on what they can add, rather than how they fit.

Problem 2: Inherent Vs Acquired Diversity – what do we focus on?

Basing your hiring decision on a factor that is entirely uncontrollable by the candidate, like their gender, age, race, ethnicity etc. is discrimination.

It's discrimination when you don't hire them because of these factors, of course, but discrimination against other candidates in the pool because they didn't get hired because they were the other gender, age, race, ethnicity etc. These inherent factors that are completely uncontrollable by the



candidate are NOT what we should be focusing on when hiring.

However, these inherent factors do influence a person's acquired characteristics. Acquired characteristics are factors like language, religion, educational attainment, resilience and mindset, political affiliation, hard skills (like the ability to assemble IKEA furniture or conduct an analysis using Excel), and communication skills.

Think about how a person who's born to immigrant parents grows up, often acquiring both their parent's native tongues as well as their country's national language. How their fellow community responds and reacts to them is influenced by this person's outward appearance (ethnicity), which in turn influences their mindset and resilience capability.

Their parent's culture may influence their educational attainment or work prospects.

Within an organisation, we want people with different acquired skills and characteristics. Focus on what acquired characteristics you can add to your team and company, and consider how inherent characteristics influence these.

These acquired characteristics are a huge bonus for your team and organisation.

You're not hiring a person because they're female, or because they're of a different

ethnicity, or because they're older/younger.

You're hiring them because they carry with them a different set of life experience, life skills, education, worldview – and that is what is most valuable.

That is true diversity.

Problem 3: Leaky Bucket & Regrets

If a candidate is hired “because she's a woman”, or that is the perception amongst the team she's joining, she will not be truly accepted into the team. The begrudgery will prevent her from being included, her contributions will likely be diminished or ignored.

The exclusion will more than likely lead to a really poor on-boarding and ramp-up experience. She may “stick it out” for a year where it won't look bad on her resume, but as soon as she has another offer, she'll take it. And just like that, your “diversity” is gone.

Leaky buckets of diverse talent are rife in organisations, and it's down to a lack of inclusion. Hiring Managers start to get stuck in their hiring ways – “The last two women I hired left before a year, they couldn't hack it.

I'm not going to hire another” – attributing employees who leave early down to poor performance or poor fit, rather than any action

they took (or didn't take). When a hiring decision is forced on a hiring manager, rather than be their own decision, they will likely not mentor this candidate as much as they would otherwise.

It's critical that we frame this candidate properly. Why is this candidate the best? She meets and exceeds our hiring bar because she has proven skills in [this], [that] and [the other], she brings with her great skill additions to the team that we're badly in need of like [example 1], [example 2], she has a great adaptable attitude and has proven her ability to learn complex sales processes and excel at them from her time at [her last company].

Hiring decisions are easier when they're “no-brainers”.

Problem 4: Win-Lose Attitude

“In order for a diverse candidate to get the job, it means that a white middle-class male won't.” That's a win-lose attitude that women, in particular, have been battling for decades.

It's the common refrain when quotas are introduced. Again, a focus on the acquired diversity (like intellectual diversity – Autism Spectrum Disorder for example; educational attainment; native-level language skills) will help teams to look past the inherent characteristics of talent.





You're the gatekeeper. "This attitude is just not acceptable at our organisation." Say it. Report it if it persists.

Problem 5: Poor Attraction Effort

For example, insisting that employees be in the office at specific times, for no reason. Sometimes, great talent requires adaptations to their workplace or schedule so that they can:

- 1) get to work
- 2) do their best work
- 3) not think about anything else but work while they're at work.

The current working generations have never been more under pressure from caring responsibilities, whether it's children or a parent/sibling/partner whom they care for. These employees are very much motivated to work, because they are supporting their family. Just because they need to start at 9:30 instead of 9am, or leave at 4pm to relieve child-minders or nurses, is not a bad thing.

Similarly, how difficult is it to accommodate an employee's (or group of employees) working environment? From silent zones to accessible floors, reading software to adaptable technology.

Are you currently doing this at your organisation? Have you spoken with teams at your company to get their ideas on adaptable working?

Sometimes our diversity efforts are reduced because we're focusing on showcasing obvious resource groups (Military, Women, LGBTQ+ etc), but we miss out on accommodating those with disabilities or intellectual diversity. We miss out on those

who are night owls rather than morning larks. We miss those who'd love to work some time from home. Make the case at your company to either highlight your existing perks and adaptable working through your employer branding channels, or if you don't do these things, perform a cost-benefit analysis of incorporating them.

Internal barriers to diversity and employee engagement

It's a well-documented fact that engaged employees are more satisfied, and therefore, more productive in the workplace.

It makes sense that hiring managers would make an effort to foster a culture that engages all employees equally. It makes sense for both our human needs and our business needs.

As companies make an effort to build a culture that will cultivate engagement and productivity they could be overlooking one of the most malignant barriers to employee productivity.

What is Covering?

Covering is the practice of hiding some true aspect of your personality or lifestyle for fear of not conforming to people's expectations in the workplace. Kenji Yoshino, the Chief Justice at The Earl Warren professor of constitutional law, New York School of Law, is credited with the bulk of primary research into the area of covering.

He conducted research of 3000 professionals across various disciplines, leadership levels and industries. Yoshino concluded that when individuals cover in work, they do so on one of four axes.

Appearance

When individuals alter their self-presentation (attire, grooming, mannerisms, speech)

People can begin appearance based covering if they feel the way they look or present themselves could affect their professional advancement. Employees (and candidates) can feel they need to look a certain way in order to be accepted by their colleagues. As a hiring manager can you imagine interviewing a candidate with blue hair?

Does this distract you from conducting an in-depth interview? Can you see this candidate being successful at your company?

Association

Individuals avoid contact with other group members.
An employee can make decisions to abstain from

61%

61% of people admit to covering on at least one axis



certain activities because they do not want to be associated with a particular motive. An employee who was once an alcoholic may not attend the staff drinks party because they do not want to be associated with people who drink.

Advocacy

Individuals may avoid speaking up for others in a particular group. This particular form of covering stops us from speaking up for or protecting a group of people or way of life.

If everyone in the office is laughing at a joke that pokes fun at gay people, a homosexual employee (or any employee for that matter) may feel they should let it slide instead of making a stand and singling themselves out.

Affiliation

Individuals avoid behaviours widely associated with their identity, often to negate stereotypes about that identity.

People can cover a certain aspect of their lives when they don't want to feed into any negative aspect of a particular stereotype.

For example, a mother at work may not mention her children because she does not want to perpetuate the stereotype that women are less career focussed because of family commitments.

How does covering affect employees?

For hiring managers, it is important to remember that people leave jobs because they can not see a clear progression path.

How many candidates have you encountered who have left an organization because they felt they needed to cover on at least one of the axes mentioned above?

Covering hampers authenticity. If my day is devoted to dampening down a major aspect of my life, it will begin to affect my engagement and productivity levels. All the mental energy employees spend overthinking and cautiously navigating their way through the workday negatively impacts their performance, and most importantly, their happiness at work.

One of the most dangerous aspects of covering is that it isn't saved for a specific group. We can't file it under racism, sexism or ageism- things that negatively impact specific people. The need to cover can be felt by anyone.

What can hiring managers do to help?

Torin Ellis has been helping people combat the negative force of covering and driving policies that reflect true diversity and inclusion in organizations. He believes hiring managers need to start questioning the companies they

work for and pushing for diversity reform. Hiring managers need to become more aware of the nuances and balances that employees adopt in the work pace. It's critical to note that people who have covered on some level believe it was expected of them from a leadership level.

This is a dangerous feeling to have in an organisation. If people feel they need to act in a particular way to progress in a company it will dampen and diversity initiatives and force authenticity and excellent employees out of that company.

“When corporations talk about “diversity,” a significant chunk of the population tunes out. They’re not talking about me, they assume. But if you, as a manager, introduce the concept of “covering” the conversations shift. Everyone can relate to the term because most people have done it at some point in their career, and it permits a new dialogue on your team about differences. It’s a small but subtle change that ensures everyone recognizes they’re a part of the discussion.”

*- Dorie Clark & Christi Smith**



Combatting covering is an easy first step to creating a larger diversity and inclusion policy. Teaching people who don't need to protect or hide any part of their identity in your company will have a huge impact on your employees that will help them feel more welcome at work.

How can open-minded hiring benefit hiring managers?

Most hiring managers understand the importance of embracing a diverse pool of talent when hiring. Unfortunately, there is a myriad of evidence to suggest that discrimination is still a major factor both before and during the interview process, and therefore there are qualified and well-suited candidates who are missing opportunities due to discriminatory practices.

It is not always obvious to the hiring manager that these biases are affecting who fills a role in a company, and so it is therefore of the utmost importance to be aware of the potential unconscious biases which exist inherently – whether we like it or not.

Unconscious bias training is undertaken by most organisation these days, though the reasons behind this may not be as straightforward or well-meaning as we think.

Companies approach the issue of diversity as a box to be ticked – all well and good if the aim is to avoid losing money in the long run – but keeping an open mind can make life and work easier more generally.

As a hiring manager here are 5 benefits of open-minded hiring that can positively affect your whole company

Bringing candidates to your door

Unconscious bias when hiring can thankfully be addressed through training, and it is possible for recruiters to actively seek out candidates.

However, wouldn't life be so much easier if these diverse candidates contacted you? If you and your company have a reputation for diverse hiring, candidates will be far more likely to actively seek out roles. There is a wealth of talent out there knocking on doors, you have to make sure that you're one of them.

An open-minded leadership team

If candidates don't see people like them in leadership roles – people who act, look and present like them – they won't find an affinity with that type of organisation.

In order for candidates to be attracted to a role in the first place, they must be able to identify with some of those who hold leadership positions in the company, otherwise, they will find it more difficult to visualise a progression for themselves within the company.

Enriching your workforce

A diverse workforce is an enriched workforce. Different experiences will give way to new ways of thinking, and so innovation will come a lot easier to a company which keeps an open mind. Languages, cultural differences, and alternative ways of approaching problems are therefore an inherent part

36%

Diverse companies are **36% more likely** to outperform than non diverse companies*





of the business model and not something which needs to be shoe-horned into a contrived diversity strategy.

Vast talent pool

Are you looking to fill a role which requires fluency in both French and Arabic? How about a role which requires a degree of understanding of political correctness? Are you a company who makes products for women but don't seem to have any around the office?

You might have a problem with diversity, and you might end up outsourcing these skills and paying a pretty penny too. Your video producer may be able to proof-read your email to a French client for mistakes, and you may have an office manager who can point out biased language in company documents. You're saving money day-to-day, as well as creating an environment of inclusion. Win / win!

Enhancing your corporate reputation

A company which champions diversity and open-minded hiring will have a strong reputation and ultimately will place itself on the winning side of the war for talent.

Employer branding can make or break a candidate's decision to join a company, and hiring managers can't afford to let top talent slip through their fingers. Would you rather work for an organisation which embraces difference and makes the most of its diverse team members, or would you prefer to hear the same ideas over and over again day after day?

We know which we prefer!



A 3-Step Essential Guide For D&I Success At Your Company

1. Understand what D&I looks like

When introducing D&I initiatives into your company, it's important that your company first understands the definition of D&I and what it looks like. Diversity & Inclusion is so much more than race and gender.

Furthermore, it's important to emphasise the importance of D&I initiatives. Much talk has been centred a 'number' being the most important drive.

However, if you clarify the fact of leveraging D&I to produce a better service, product or solution within your company – all will become clearer for the rest of your workforce. Russell Reynolds Associates surveyed 2,167 executives around the world and it was clear that many struggled with understanding 'inclusion'.

2. Kickstart your strategy

Having a D&I strategy is critical to your company's success. But again, understanding the difference between both the 'D' and the 'I' will feed into you creating a comprehensive strategy. With this strategy, a business owner, CEO or top-tier leader needs to take control of creating a plan. More often than not,

a strategy is created and over the series of a few months, the strategy is forgotten about.

To ensure that your strategy remains full of life and is implemented correctly, you should;
Create a D&I council to ensure best practices are being adhered to. Make sure you receive monthly updates on where your company stands.

Refine your initial strategy as your company evolves so that it remains current and up-to-date.
Measure your efforts.

3. Start today & lead by example

It's important for every leader to lead by example. As a CEO, manager or team leader – things shouldn't be any different. Promote an open workplace where people of all backgrounds can communicate effectively. You want people to feel accepted and appreciated.

People from all walks of life will have different perspectives on how things should operate in your company.

Listening to each point-of-view and responding accordingly (where you see fit), will teach others best practice. Russell Reynolds Associates again show how you can start acting today.

40%

Over 40% believe that their company's inclusion of these groups





What is diversity fatigue?

Diversity fatigue is the phrase used by Atlassian to describe this suspension of progress. This report is the second of its kind, investigating the attitudes of tech workers in Silicon Valley, and in the United States. Though 80% of respondents said that Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) was important in their organisation, only 40% of underrepresented groups have retention, representation and a sense of belonging. In addition, over 40% believe that their company's inclusion of these groups need improvement.

These numbers highlight a serious discrepancy between what is said and what is done in tech, so we must now ask if the industry is at risk of being labelled 'all talk' about these issues. It's no wonder that diversity fatigue is setting in.

Diversity VS Inclusion?

One of the primary causes of this problem can be found in an ill-placed set of priorities. Does your company have a diversity issue? Focusing on

hiring a 'more diverse' workforce puts organisations at risk of transforming the issue into one of numbers.

'More diverse' is often a problematic concept when it comes to hiring new people, especially when the existing workforce isn't entirely settled into the company culture. Though it may be easy for a company to see 'Diversity & Inclusion' as an umbrella term for the culturally indiscriminate workplace, it is imperative that each element is treated with equal but distinct weight.

Inclusion appears to be an afterthought to so-called 'diversity quotas', and thus retention, employee health and happiness, and company culture are suffering because of it. As well as ensuring the widest talent pool for potential candidates when hiring, organisations must also ensure that there are sufficient resources dedicated to sexual harassment, bullying, and unfairness.



Develop Recruitment Skills that Drive an Open Minded Culture



Now it's your turn

The path to a fully functional and truly effective diverse hiring process is like a professional snakes and ladders board. Companies make steps forward and then slide back due to complacency or poor efforts to sustain their good work.

Taking small, considered steps to make your hiring procedures and critical decisions more open-minded will slowly open your process and create a more transparent and forward thinking company that will benefit from an inclusive and engaged workforce.

Who is Your Presenter?

Torin Ellis: Author of “RIP The Resume”, Founder of Second Motive and renowned diversity strategist Torin Ellis spearheads our Diversity and Inclusion programme.

For the best part of the last decade, Torin has been at the forefront of the workplace diversity movement and has consulted with global organisations such as ESPN, EMC, CircleBack and Redfin among others.

[Start Your Mission](#) →



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