4 Commitments All Truly Inclusive Leaders Must Follow

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2022 was the first year of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion accountability for inclusive leaders. Our future will be filled with increasing expectations from employees, customers and business partners, looking for us to step up and courageously respond to societal needs and problems across human differences. It won't be easy, but it will be good.

Let's bring some substance into our learning of how to lead more inclusively. Here's a deeper dive into four crucial concepts and skills for inclusive leaders in the coming year.

1. Choose kindness over making others wrong

I'm unsure when or why we permitted kindness to become a sign of fragility or ineffectiveness. We have a nauseating array of "leaders" who demonize people who disagree politically with them, call names, refuse to care and instead foment the pain of trans people. The examples of meanness and cruelty are simply too long to list. Kindness is often seen as a weakness in the workplace. There's an epidemic of giving into the self-obsessed impulse to make ourselves right and make others wrong, almost for the insidious sport of it. That is a way to shred relationships. And we see massive malice on social media.

Kindness is respecting another person's dignity in ways that help them be happy, comforted, heard or whole.

Inclusion can be defined in the same way. As an inclusive leader, how do you ensure that your colleagues know that you care about their psychological safety, day-to-day struggles and ambitions? Choose kindness and equip others to be alright, not wrong. Prioritize relationships.

Related: **Why Kindness Is A Crucial Quality For Leaders**

2. Commit to evidence-based decision making

Inclusive leaders think critically, use credible data and make decisions on that basis. They include their teams and peers in decision-making. This is not an argument for cold-hearted objectivity – inclusive leaders take the complexity of human identities into account and seek to factor in the emotions of all involved. Evidence, facts, truth: whatever words you use, the idea is central for effective and inclusive leaders.

Inclusive leaders must reject conspiracy-based opinions without evidence, excessively emotional pleas that are more about advocacy than the business you're there to conduct or unending deliberations or analyses that claim to be 'inclusive' at the expense of actually making a good and timely decision.

Diversity, equity and inclusion should be a source of rigor in your leadership work. Build a healthy definition of 'evidence' (and emotions are one kind of evidence), and stay in the game by making inclusive decisions.

3. Center the future on realities from the past

This is not a complicated point: we cannot prepare ourselves and our children for the future if we are afraid of our

collective past. No committed inclusive leader will accept a law, a policy or a practice to censor history because it makes someone uncomfortable. We need to say this plainly: it's pure fear and unproductive denial to pass laws that "protect white people from discomfort" when solving the ongoing impacts of racism or antisemitism, or homophobia.

Such a stance stifles learning, refuses to prepare all our children for the multiracial and otherwise diverse reality of the world we already live in, and directly supports the forms of systemic bias that real patriots fight every day. Suppose your school district or government has passed such laws or policies as an inclusive leader. In that case, you should consider how to change such decisions with powerful education and insistent kindness.

Related: **Don't Let Fear Conquer Your Greatness**

4. Champion demography as destiny

The multicultural future has already arrived. Maybe even our families have evolved: babies of color have been the majority of children born for six years, and interracial marriages are now commonplace. Study the 2020 Census, and you will realize our population has been diversifying for generations. The identity mix of your customers and employees is completely profound right now. The way to learn about diversity is widening: neurodivergence, working across generations, navigating languages and cultures to grow globally, understanding the impact of spirituality and religious differences, etc.

Demographics cause us to consider how our future is already here and coming close. And the elements of DEI will only expand 'in the future.' All this change is pushing on your business model: where you source product and talent, how you manage differences with customers and reach new ones, how you work with suppliers and regulators, how DEI equips you to

measure what matters in your unit, why you invest in a market or a merger. Inclusive leaders engage demography, so we have the chance to thrive.

These are some profound challenges for inclusive leaders in the coming years. I encourage you to pursue these Four C’s: choose kindness, commit to evidence-based decision-making, center a future on the realities of the past and champion demographics.

And a final thought: leading with these challenges in view will help you mend and tend to family relationships during the holiday season and beyond. We can listen to build trust and practice inclusive leadership wherever we go.

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