True Inclusion Is Defined by Long-Term Commitment

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Given that Women's History Month and International Day of the Girl take place every year, I often doubt the DEI commitment of companies that start asking about events and solutions that "engage women" a month or two before those moments.

True DEI champions are currently talking about plans with clear repercussions for 2034; true leaders see inclusion as table stakes for future-proofing their business, not as an altruistic, performative marketing campaign.

As the lead of The Collective, a women's advocacy group in sports and music, March and October always seem to be the busiest months between speaking engagements, opinion pieces and general celebrations of women and girls. But all too often, it's only those months. And that's an intersectionally relatable issue.

Gone are the days when "let's go, girls" was just a rallying cry. The entire Western world's economy is shifting to women being the current and future wealth holders. Gen Z women—the most powerful economic generation yet—are not only steering purchase decisions but will own two-thirds of the wealth in the U.S. by 2030. Additionally, they, along with Gen Z men, believe in and will spend on companies that authentically make the world a better place.

Oh, and they care about equality and equity beyond March and October. And they remember if that’s the only time you talked to them about it.

To truly win their hearts, a brand must build credibility first and foremost; that means intersectionality and supporting inclusion outwardly as well as celebrating it internally. Only when your own house is in order can you think about being a trusted advisor to consumers dipping their toe into inclusion or monetizing your brand’s position on it.

Commitment demands long-term structure

80% of Gen Z consumers expect companies today to help solve the world’s biggest issues, and 92% will reward them with purchases. Still, for many companies, even those already prioritizing inclusion, evolving from a product- or service-focused marketing history to one that regularly wraps in their worldviews can be a daunting proposition. That’s why brands often fall into the trap of performative support.

Setting tangible, achievable objectives with consistent structural support gives you a place to start and grow from. In creating the environment for true change, you allow for culture shifts constantly, and once you realize you’ll never be ahead or in control of culture, you attain the grace to have flexibility in achieving your goals.

One place to start is creating an internal council of employees who are interested and committed to creating an inclusive ecosystem. This group can simply create appropriate and timely reminders of cultural events and what they mean to different groups. At minimum, it helps educate individuals on beliefs and events they may not have been exposed to and

hopefully will open minds a bit further.

Repeatedly at the top of Most Inclusive lists is Progressive. For over 15 years, it’s built a large dedicated team (of eight) singularly set on creating programs, education and opportunities for employees through leadership and job-based training as well as courses in self-awareness. Progressive also provides specialized initiatives, like its Multicultural Leadership Development Program, and specific boot camps designed to increase diversity and equity. It’s a company where the values are reflected in the output, due to the capital and resources it puts behind its DEI structure.

Commitment demands shared access

True inclusion does not seek competitive advantage. However, inclusive access builds and sustains your company’s credibility over the years and through the storms.

Create and share freely with those a little further behind you, in terms of employee programming, diverse vendor and supplier lists, formal and informal partnerships, and any playbooks and toolkits you develop to make your company more inclusive. Do this right, and in 10 years, your company, its customers, partners and greater industry will be better off.

Accenture has long been committed to equity and inclusion, executing on a robust strategy that helps support and educate its more than 738,000 employees. In fact, it has spent over $1.1 billion on learning and development opportunities, is actively supporting the LGBTQ+ community with 120,000 Pride allies across all countries of operation, and is increasing accessibility through 32 centers established for disabled talent to access the tools, technology and support to be successful in their roles.

For a better 2034, ask: How can we, as a company made up of individuals, create and consistently share best practices with our industry? How can we ensure that while we may be

competitors in business, we are allies in the fight for equity and inclusion?

Commitment demands transparent investment

Investing in equity and inclusion measures is not about singular programs or employee resource groups. Appropriate funding demonstrates to your employees that you are serious about the access and accountability you established to align with your stated goals. Investment allows for partnerships and educational programs to be developed with full effect and creates more reasons to tell the stories of inclusivity that matter most.

To create lasting change, start with an audit of your investment in recruiting and hiring practices; this may require external expertise but sets up your company for long-term diversity.

Ally Financial demonstrated significant success in retaining and advancing people of color, as noted in its 2022 report. Ally has not only created educational outlets for its employees and customers with great success (reportedly over 40% of its employees joined an ERG), but it has used its partnerships across women's sports as a call to action for other brands to level up in their support of women, women athletes and women's sports. Andrea Brimmer, its CMO and a former athlete, committed more than 45% of the company's sports marketing budget in 2023 to women's sports.

As an industry, we've mistakenly operated under the impression that intent is where solutions live. We've since learned, from the world speaking to us loud and clear, that impact supersedes intent. That means moment-to-moment tactics will never create the impact you want. If the existing industry

approach was enough, we’d have created much more change by now.

As we turn a corner as an industry toward true DEI focus, we recognize that progress starts with long-term commitment and is nothing without it; if you don’t have a long-term plan, you don’t have a plan at all.

Giving depth and marking tangible progress in diversity isn’t a monthly celebration. It requires work, planning, goal-setting, partnership and accountability. You’ll know you’ve achieved success when Women’s History Month, Pride Month and Juneteenth don’t feel like obligations or surprises, but rather opportunities to celebrate and commemorate the diverse ecosystem you have carefully crafted.

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