



QUARTERLY SPECIAL REPORT

8 BUSINESS BENEFITS OF BUILDING A RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE CULTURE



HUMAN RESOUR



INTRODUCTION

Racial minorities will make up a majority of the country's population sometime between 2041 and 2046, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. Add in age, sex, ethnicity, disability, socio-economic class, and other differences and it is clear that workplace diversity is no longer an aspiration, but a reality.

Increased diversity within the workplace and the need for a sense of belonging are important topics today. A feeling of belonging among all employees has a positive impact on organizations.

Take a look at your coworkers. You probably see people from several generations. Perhaps many are from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Your coworkers may also have varying characteristics that set them apart from others. You cannot necessarily see some of these characteristics, such as religion and invisible disabilities. However, a feeling of belonging among everyone is vital to employees' well-being and the company's overall success.

This becomes more challenging as our workforces become more diverse.

WHAT IS WORKPLACE DIVERSITY?

Diversity exists whenever there are differences among a group of people. Workplace diversity is when a variety of these differences, called characteristics, exist at work. These characteristics include race, national origin, age, sex, disabilities, social class, veteran status, or pregnancy. Characteristics also include beliefs and perspectives such as religion, opinions on various subjects, and abilities.

Abilities among people may vary between physical skills and educational backgrounds. And everyone behaves differently and has different experiences. This is because each individual life journey is unique. Just like no two people are 100 percent identical, no two workplaces are 100 percent identical.





WHAT IS EQUAL OPPORTUNITY?

Equal opportunity at work means employees are treated fairly despite their differences. It means removing barriers so that everyone has a chance to succeed based on their merits.

Equal opportunity-focused businesses consider individual needs. They account for barriers faced by certain people because of characteristics, such as race, sex, disability, religion or belief, or age.

Equal opportunity can be difficult to measure, but an employer may start by surveying staff. A survey may be used to try to identify any barriers employees think prevent fair treatment and equal opportunity. The survey may ask employees if they believe they are treated fairly. It may also ask if they feel their pay and benefits are fair for their job and experience.

Management may also conduct pay assessments to make sure employees are paid fairly. This is based on employees' experience and the jobs they do, not their characteristics.

WHAT IS WORKPLACE BELONGING?

In the workplace, belonging is a sense of acceptance, connection, and community while at work. At an organization that emphasizes belonging and values individuals' differences, employees are encouraged to bring their whole, unique selves to work. They do not feel the need to hide any part of themselves. Nor do they feel the need to follow certain standards informally set by the majority of employees.

Think to yourself, what makes you feel accepted by your employer or your coworkers? What makes you feel excluded or unwelcome?

In a workplace that focuses on belonging, team members commonly say they feel:

- ▶ Safe and accepted while being themselves,
- ▶ Comfortable asking questions and suggesting ideas, and
- ▶ Respected and valued for being who they are.

In addition, they commonly say they trust their coworkers and managers. They say they feel they are treated fairly and their ideas and opinions are listened to. And finally, they express feeling that they have equal access to opportunities and resources, which allows them to contribute fully to the organization's success.

ONGOING EFFORT

Organizations that maintain a culture of belonging help every individual feel welcomed, accepted, known, and valued. This starts with commitment at the executive management level. It also requires the continuous effort of every employee. As an employee, you need to be willing to get to know, understand, and respect all of your coworkers, regardless of their individual characteristics.

Building a culture of belonging requires an ongoing effort and does not stop after a person is hired. It requires commitment from managers, leaders, teams, and peers. It relies on positive day-to-day interactions between employees.



8 BUSINESS BENEFITS OF A DIVERSE AND RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE

There are many benefits that result from embracing diversity, promoting equal opportunity, and fostering a sense of respect and belonging. This includes higher productivity and profits, reduced risks of litigation, increased worker engagement and innovation, easier recruiting of talent, greater market presence, and lower employee stress and turnover.



1 HIGHER PRODUCTIVITY AND PROFITS

Workplace diversity has become a competitive advantage for employers. Access to top talent, improved customer relations, and employee satisfaction all lead to greater productivity and profits. Data has shown companies in the top 25 percent for racial and ethnic diversity are 36 percent more likely to have above average financial returns compared to similarly sized companies in the same industry.

2 LESS MONEY SPENT ON LITIGATION

As workplaces inevitably become more diverse, it is critical employers continually focus on inclusion. This is to reduce and eliminate workplace discrimination incidences. Failing to do this could be costly.

Each year the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) secures millions of dollars for employees who were victims of workplace discrimination.

A company can be held liable for discrimination it does not even know about. That is because the law says the company should have known about the discrimination. The law also says that if a supervisor knows of discrimination, it is assumed the company has knowledge of it. This means if you don't know how to properly handle complaints of discrimination, your company could be held liable.

3 INCREASED ENGAGEMENT AND INNOVATION

Teams that are diverse tend to be more engaged and innovative.

People who feel accepted at work can concentrate more on doing their jobs because they worry less about personal interactions with coworkers. Also, when people are exposed to different opinions in a diverse environment, they are forced to rethink their assumptions. This is when new ideas tend to come about. In other words, having too many employees who think the same way limits innovation.

4 EXPANDED TALENT POOL

Having a reputation that fosters a respectful and welcoming environment can help you attract more employees. This is especially beneficial for attracting top talent from diverse talent pools. In fact, a recent survey conducted by Glassdoor showed that 76 percent of job seekers say a diverse workforce is important when considering job offers.

5 WIDER MARKET

A diverse workforce is better equipped to respond to an expanding market.

If your workforce mirrors the varied population of the United States, it not only increases your talent pool, but it benefits your customers and clients as well. An employee who is able to speak a language other than English, for example, may be able to help when marketing to a larger audience. It may be easier for them to overcome communication issues or cultural barriers. For this reason, diverse organizations may be more effective in serving and sustaining international customers. This is because their own workforce is familiar with the needs of other cultural and ethnic groups.





6 POSITIVE PUBLIC RELATIONS

It is best to have a reputation of being inclusive. Sometimes companies get negative media attention for their lack of diversity. This can impact their reputation and brand.

Customers are more likely to purchase from a company if its brand creates positive feelings among its customers. In turn, the company is more likely to make money. Customers are less likely to purchase from a company with a poor reputation, which could contribute to reduced revenue and longevity.

7 LOWER EMPLOYEE STRESS

Employees experience reduced stress levels in a diverse, respectful workplace where they feel included.

A lack of diversity has been linked to increased discrimination. This in turn leads to elevated stress levels among employees — especially when discrimination is due to race, religion, or a person's sex, just to name a few.

8 LOWER EMPLOYEE TURNOVER

Employee loyalty increases within a diverse, respectful workforce where employees have equal opportunities and feel a sense of belonging. This is because employees who feel accepted, valued, included, and safe at work are happier and tend to stay longer with the organization. Additionally, a positive workplace culture creates an environment where teams are more unified and thrive.

CONCLUSION

A respectful workplace helps everyone do their best. It starts with treating people fairly, removing bias, and welcoming a diverse workforce. Managers can set the tone by listening, showing respect, and encouraging teamwork. When people feel valued and safe, they work harder, stay longer, and bring in new ideas. Respect leads to better results for both employees and the company.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Judy Kneiszel joined J. J. Keller & Associates, Inc., in May 2018. As a Compliance Expert, she has become an expert on a wide array of HR topics, including employee relations, discrimination, terminations, policies and sexual harassment prevention, as well as hiring, onboarding, and background checks. Judy is responsible for the content of the *Employment Law Regulatory Alert* newsletter and *Essentials of Employee Relations* manual. She also specializes in employment law posters.



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