

Without accountability, DEI initiatives will fail

By Hawzien Gebremedhin | November 29, 2023

When I begin a seminar about diversity, equity and inclusion, I sometimes see the audience's eyes glaze over on that first word: diversity.

Oftentimes people think diversity is synonymous with race or gender. They may think: "Based on my identity, this isn't for me."

But the truth is, DEI is about more than only race and gender and affects everyone — even those who don't think they need it.

And, here's the thing: DEI is no longer "nice to have." It's a "need to have." Why? Because your initiatives can attract and retain top candidates and valuable clients.

A 2022 survey from GoodHire reported that 81% of American workers would consider leaving their job over a lack of DEI commitment, and 54% would take a pay cut to leave for a company with a more robust DEI journey.

The only way to make sure everyone is included is through concerted DEI initiatives that call for attention and accountability from the entire staff, especially senior leadership.

Measure DEI accountability

To ensure DEI efforts work, and to more accurately measure accountability within senior leadership, you have to measure the effectiveness of your programs and initiatives. However, DEI is often grouped in with other cultural performance metrics and incentives. This was the case at Plante Moran — so we intentionally separated culture and DEI metrics to more accurately measure our journey. We're now able to ensure our leaders are:

- Recruiting and retaining staff from underrepresented communities;
- Attending and encouraging participation in DEI initiatives; and,
- Acting as mentors for diverse staff members.

How do you determine what to measure? We looked at the information we could capture and calculate — things like gender (including nonbinary), veteran status, race and

ethnicity. Then, through annual staff surveys and information gathered from staff resource groups, we calculate staff sentiment, giving team members an opportunity to share their insight and perspective on the firm's progress in DEI.

Put intentions into words

Memorialize your DEI intentions so they're ingrained into your company's culture and instill accountability.

Plante Moran lives by 17 core principles based on the golden rule. Fifteen of these principles were introduced decades ago, but we recently added two more — including a principle of DEI. DEI had become a critical part of our culture, and last year we cemented that importance into our core principles.

By making your DEI journey actionable — dedicating space in your core values is a good start — you demonstrate your dedication to internal accountability.

Require accountability at all levels

Staff who see themselves represented are more likely to recognize an organization's commitment to DEI. This is where employee or staff resource groups (ERGs or SRGs) come into play.

At Plante Moran, we have SRGs for a range of diverse communities. We encourage staff to speak up if they don't see themselves represented by an SRG — and recently a group of staff came to us to initiate one of our newest and now largest SRGs: Minds of All Kinds. This resource group focuses on staff members (and allies) who are neurodivergent. They've allowed us to rethink how we show up to work, make accommodations as needed, and increase our general sense of inclusion — and they reminded us why DEI is so important to Plante Moran: It ensures everyone is heard from so we can understand all perspectives.

Remember, DEI is a journey

DEI takes work. It takes attention. And it takes patience. But organizations that are intentional and actionable with their efforts will be surprised by what they can accomplish.