



Three Steps to Meaningful DEI Change: What Business Leaders Must Do

By Juliette Mayers

Updated. Originally published 2021

"Lasting DEI change requires hard work" - Juliette Mayers

Step One to Meaningful DEI Change

Shift your mindset. Real diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) change is not a program. It's not a moment. DEI is integral to who we are as individuals. It requires that we learn about others, including the historical and systemic issues that impact people and cultures. The right mindset is extremely important because most workplaces and spaces are guided by leadership at the top. What your organization values is reflected in the budgets, policies, programs, and the culture of the organization.

The hard work begins at the individual level with introspection, a willingness and commitment to education and awareness, uncovering blind spots, developing empathy for the lived experiences of others, and examining your personal journey -- your "why." Be open to thinking differently and doing things differently.

Too often, well-meaning actions are disrupted because leaders are not flexible. Meaningful change takes time, a commitment to learning, persistence, humility, and patience. Often this means slowing things down to minimize bias and to be intentional about equitable solutions. When the introspection and mindset shift is authentic, it permeates everything else. It is reflected in the quality of conversations, meeting protocols, how people are onboarded and so on.

"Culture eats strategy for breakfast." - Peter Drucker

Step Two to Meaningful DEI Change

Focus on culture. You may be familiar with the famous Peter Drucker quote "**Culture eats strategy for breakfast.**" This also applies to DEI strategy. In order for DEI to be sustainable, leaders must prioritize culture change to integrate DEI into the fabric of the organization. Developing a strategy is not enough. Modeling the behaviors and practices that you expect will go a long way towards driving culture change. If you truly value education and learning, then allocate resources for it and be an active participant. Don't just say it. Do it.

Step Three to Meaningful DEI Change

It's not enough to bring new people into the organization or to change policies to be more equitable if stated values, behaviors, and norms are not aligned. It's painful to watch leaders who short-circuit the complex work of culture change, only to see their efforts fail. DEI education and training alone, will not change your culture. Take the time to conduct an objective assessment of your organization, develop a well-informed plan, and allow time for implementation and culture change.

Help people connect to each other in meaningful ways. Provide opportunities at work for people to get to know each other. This is essential for employees who work remotely and is beneficial for everyone. Networking and engagement in common activities helps to build relationships. Strong relationships lead to more effective teams and to higher levels of satisfaction and belonging.

Hold everyone accountable. Ultimately the CEO and leadership are responsible for the DEI strategy. Leaders can build accountability for DEI into the organization's performance management system to ensure that everyone plays a role in the implementation of DEI.

A common mistake is to expect the Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) to own and be fully accountable for DEI. One person cannot and should not own DEI. It must be a shared responsibility.

Tips to ensure DEI accountability for all:

- **Goals** - Establish DEI goals and discuss them regularly. Everyone should have DEI goals that are aligned with the overall strategy.
- **Communication** - Create DEI communication plans across all channels. Have all business areas report on how they are advancing DEI.
- **Metrics/Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** - Embed DEI metrics into your performance measurement system and monitor performance relative to goals.
- **Positive Rewards & Recognition** - Recognize and reward employees who are positive ambassadors for DEI. It's a great way to keep up morale and to build DEI momentum.

A trusted advisor, author and award-winning business strategist, Juliette Mayers consults on DEI strategy, brand management and thought leadership. She is the host of "Entering the Inspiration Zone Podcast."