



**DIVERSITY** EXECUTIVE (/diversity)

# Top 3 Things Wrong with Diversity & Inclusion Training

**Failure to communicate the true benefits of diversity and inclusion plague expensive and time-consuming training that should get leaders on board.**

David Ciliberto (/authors/1358-david-ciliberto/articles)

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There has been significant progress in the area of diversity and inclusion in the workplace in recent years. It is an evolution being created through the understanding and application of diversity (which emphasizes differences and similarities) and inclusion (which emphasizes “who” participates and “who” is leveraged in decision-making) training in the workplace. Though there is passion and positive intent among people in organizations seeking to enhance the focus for diversity and create a better workplace culture, there is also a climate of stress as leaders become overwhelmed because of too many priorities at once and not enough resources to support multiple goals.

Let’s take a look at the top three problems we see right now in diversity training.

## **1. Failure to connect diversity and inclusion to the business case.**

Leaders need to review their organization’s vision and mission to see if any of the following are referenced: customers/clients, employees/volunteers, students/faculty or community. Most likely, there is a direct business connection to people — through your customer base, your employees, your shareholders or the population at large. As our society and economy becomes more diverse

and global, it is integrating people and culture while creating a much stronger connection within organizations to the people that they serve, employ, partner and collaborate with. It is this business case that needs to connect with internal diversity training.

Common terms used in the business case are:

- **The Marketplace:** Understanding what is happening in the world and in society at-large that is impacting your organization.
- **The Workplace:** Understanding the dynamics of organizational culture and how that plays a part in whom you attract, develop, promote, train and retain for talent.
- **The Workforce:** Understanding the changing demographics of this population.

These parameters are a good first step when focusing on diversity and inclusion training in your organization. It builds awareness that diversity is a critical element to business and organizational survival.

It is important to obtain information and data to better understand your marketplace of competitors. Is there any upcoming legislation that will affect the global workplace? What is the data related to employee engagement, climate assessments, and company culture and processes? What keeps talent and why does talent leave (retention)? Make sure you have compiled research data on the changing workforce demographics as well, which includes skills, gaps and generational curves.

“One of the most intelligent decisions an organization can make is to recognize that their client base is extremely diverse across cultures, ethnicity, gender, generations and other identities,” said Amy Friedman, founder and CEO of Partners in Human Resources International. “A wide diversity of people is often tied to profitability in ways that might not seem obvious at first.”

As we know a key metric for business success is looking at the ROI. This holds true for diversity and inclusion as well as other business activities. What is your employee retention? Are you promoting from within? Is there an increased market share for your business in diverse markets? Are you rated on “Best Places to Work” surveys? The yield and ROI comes from connecting the business case to the efforts in diversity and inclusion.

## 2. Failure to understand and utilize an integrated approach to diversity.

The second common problem in diversity training is the failure to understand and utilize an integrated approach to diversity and inclusion within the organization. Once you have evaluated the business case elements above, you can start evaluating your data and information to set your organization's priorities and create an integrated approach to diversity training.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What do we have currently under diversity and inclusion?
- Is there mention of it in the vision or mission statement?
- Is there a team focused on diversity and inclusion?
- Are there employee resource groups?
- Is there a diversity and inclusion executive council?
- Are there diversity and inclusion training workshops in place?
- Are there diversity and inclusion celebrations promoting education and understanding?
- Are there diversity and inclusion performance goals and metrics?

Many major corporations have taken strides to make attendance and participation in diversity training mandatory for management level positions. Some organizations are having people participate in employee resource groups events; discussions at staff meetings around diversity; or even having leaders discuss diversity at town hall meetings.

“All of these opportunities to get involved, that go beyond participating in diversity training per se, really are leadership skill-building exercises for the workforce, and for executives,” said Jennifer Brown, president of Jennifer Brown Consulting, which advises Fortune 500 companies. “If cultural competency is going to make or break future leaders, involvement in D&I activities like these exposes people to experiences outside of their own, which likely mirrors the teams they're leading every day, in their day job.”

Diversity strategy is the integration of an organizational vision that is applied to each employee through goals, initiatives, endeavors, processes and inclusion of the right people for the right goal. It's integrating these touch points that helps our understanding of ourselves, others and those we

affect personally and professionally.

### **3. Failure to clarify the differences between equal employment opportunity, affirmative action and diversity and inclusion.**

EEO looks at data and identifies various gaps in the reporting. Usually this is done for governmental agencies and businesses handling government contracts, but many organizations look at similar reports to understand the makeup of their leaders and teams at various levels in the organization. Affirmative action puts in place positive programs and actions to help reduce the gaps identified by the EEO reporting.

Diversity is about the makeup of your organization; differences in people demographics, working style, skills and more. Inclusion relates to how you leverage the diversity you have to positively affect and achieve your organizational and business goals.

For diversity training to be successful in any organization, an individual action plan from each participant in the workshop needs to be created and followed. The focus of the plan needs to be the implementation and desired behavior change of what you will do differently now that you have been trained in this important area.

The approach to diversity and inclusion training discussed here is multi-tiered and it's challenging to include all of these elements. The best approach in diversity training is learning through information sharing, experiential learning and interaction with others.

David Ciliberto is a senior vice president at Partners International and adjunct instructor of diversity and inclusion at Cornell University ILR. To comment, email [editor@diversity-executive.com](mailto:editor@diversity-executive.com).



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