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BUILDING INCLUSIVE LEADERS: VOICING THE VALUE OF INCLUSION

By Anna Marie Valerio

*This post is part of a series about using the Giving Voice to Values method to help leaders become more inclusive and cultivate more diverse organizations. For more on Giving Voice to Values, read the Summer 2019 issue of (https://www.hrps.org/resources/people-strategy-journal/Summer2019/Pages/default.aspx)*People + Strategy (https://www.hrps.org/resources/people-strategy-journal/Summer2019/Pages/default.aspx)*.*

Ethical issues related to inclusion and diversity (I&D) in organizations are in the news daily. With changing demographics, organizations and their leaders must learn how to be more inclusive, that is, to create environments in which all people have equal opportunities for

resources and career advancement. How executives respond to the continuum of challenging I&D issues can make or break their reputations as effective leaders. Why has inclusion posed such a challenge for so many leaders and organizations?

Speaking Up

I & D issues are often very complex and may include, among others, workplace harassment, equity in hiring, promotions, job performance, and rewards. For leaders to arrive at fair and just solutions, it requires strong self-knowledge of their own values those of the organization. Although there are many values-driven top leaders who create inclusive environments and are known for giving voice to their values, there are many others who are less clear about how to do so. To make matters worse, in organizations with non-inclusive cultures, leaders must contend with the backlash from bosses, peers, and others. It requires strong commitment to values and takes some practice.

Fortunately, Mary Gentile's Giving Voice to Values (GVV) (https://www.darden.virginia.edu/ibis/initiatives/gvv) platform provides an innovative approach that can help in effectively acting on our values. GVV assumes as the starting point that we all want to act on our values, and offers the methodology for us to do the pre-scripting, rehearsing, and peer-coaching. (See The Actions of Ethical Behavior blog post (https://blog.hrps.org/blogpost/the-actions-of-ethical-behavior/).)

Clearly, the need for more inclusive workplaces provides a critical "area of opportunity" for both leaders and organizations. Recent statistics tell the story of the progress toward gender inclusion. Despite the numbers of women attaining higher educational (57 percent of bachelor's degrees, 60 percent of master's degrees, 36 percent of MBA degrees) and managerial levels (37 percent of mid-level), and the research showing that gender inclusion has positive economic effects over time, progress toward gender inclusion has remained slow. Furthermore, in the STEM areas of engineering and computer science, talented women leave their organizations before reaching senior management levels. What barriers have contributed to the struggle? How might GVV help leaders overcome those that remain?

Overcoming Barriers

Glass ceilings, workplace harassment, and toxic workplace environments have posed barriers to gender inclusion. Although the glass ceiling has been raised, it still exists at the top in many organizations: 5.2 percent of CEOs are women, and only 26.5 percent of women have risen to within two reporting levels of CEO. Globally, one third (33 percent) of businesses have no women in senior management roles.

The #MeToo Movement has revealed extent of workplace harassment. Speaking up about unethical, abusive behaviors allows organizations to then take actions to create more just and equitable environments. Many of the job openings that have subsequently been created have been filled by women leaders, ready for these promotional opportunities.

At a future point in time, it is possible that the #MeToo movement will be viewed as an important culture-change catalyst to correct workplace abuses and to create safe and inclusive workplaces for all.

How might GVV serve to prevent the perpetuation of toxic cultures and sexual harassment? Applications of GVV suggest that it may provide a methodology for transforming cultures by creating values-driven practices to promote respect and fairness.

In applying GVV toward the prevention of sexual harassment, Lynn Bowes-Sperry and Stacie Chappell (https://www.hrps.org/resources/people-strategy-journal/Summer2019/Pages/bowes-sperry-chappell-feature.aspx) have proposed incorporating GVV to improve anti-harassment training. In particular, helping employees recognize and respond to rationalizations to identify counter-arguments and utilizing scripting and peer-coaching may assist in building skills, before situations escalate to unlawful behaviors.

Certainly, lessons were learned from the failure of many organizations in the 1990s, often due to the ethical violations of employees and toxic work cultures. Giving employees opportunities to learn how to speak up when they see wrongdoing may be one way of countering and possibly preventing legal and ethical violations.

In a hypothetical scenario applying the GVV framework to transform a law firm culture, "culture transformation strategies" were utilized to embed GVV values into onboarding, mentoring, and complaint procedures, according to Carolyn M. Plump, JD, (https://www.hrps.org/resources/people-strategy-journal/Summer2019/Pages/plump-feature.aspx) an Associate Professor in the Management and Leadership Department at La Salle University.

These initiatives reinforce the idea that the transformation of cultures often requires burning issues and business imperatives. What, however, is the role of top leaders in giving voice to the value of inclusion? How may the inclusive behaviors of top leaders serve as a force cascading throughout the organization?

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