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# Building Inclusion without Polarization: Going from Either/Or to Both/And

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All human beings alive in the summer of 2020 anywhere on this planet are dealing with some change and disruption from Covid-19. In varying amounts, it is impacting us all, and that is not the only big change we are dealing with.

Organizations in the United States are challenged by the current focus on societal injustices and inequities requiring them to respond and create changes that build more inclusive and equitable cultures. Our knee jerk response to change is most often either/or, binary and limited. In order to create a cohesive and embracing culture, organizations need to build a climate that welcomes and hears a variety of points of view, and those may frequently be opposing. One good way to do that is to move from an either/or mentality to a both/and mindset, one that finds value in the creative solutions that can come from synergy.

This truth about human beings wanting certainty and fearing change means that predictability and security are desired and having a right way is preferred. In order to be open to exploring productive and helpful options for change, teams and groups need to foster a both/and mentality as that openness sets a tone of exploration, reconfiguration and creativity.

The following suggestions can help you create a culture that is welcoming, open and synergistic. Adopting some of these behaviors will lead to a more progressive, dynamic and engaging culture.

**1. Leaders need to talk about, advocate, offer support for and reward being open to different ways of thinking that leads to new outcomes.** Those at the top definitely convey their messages by how they behave and respond to what goes on in the work group or organization. If they advocate for hearing different views, are open to new approaches, and reward that behavior, a loud and clear message will be sent and new norms can be established.

**2. Model and encourage multiple perspectives.** The best part about a both/and norm is that employees will get a message of openness, creativity and possibilities that will make a variety of options possible. Set a norm that says challenge is always welcome. The end result is a process that thrives on a habit where options can continue to be created even when we think we have a solution. Thinking will be more open and so will real possibilities.

**3. Require three or four options before making a decision.** Challenge yourself and the group to come up with other suggestions, even when you think you have an answer. Knowing that multiple options are required before decisions are made will create a norm of exploration and creativity and minimize either or options.

**4. Get diversity around the table.** It is difficult to get a variety of points of view if you do not have people who bring different backgrounds, experiences, perspectives and thinking styles to work on an issue. Make sure you seek out members of project, problem solving and decision- making teams who bring the diversity you need to get beyond either/or and groupthink.

**5. Highlight decisions illustrating solutions that come from a both/and mindset to reinforce openness.** Being open and flexible can take some getting used to, but when employees see positive outcomes resulting from both/and, they will be more likely to buy in next time. Over time, we see people be grateful and wonder why it took them so long to gain comfort and confidence in searching for multiple possibilities.

Going from the comfort of an either/or mentality to the openness and increased

creativity of a both/and mind set changes people and how they look at life and solve problems and it changes the culture. Making both /and the norm in a group leads not only to more options but also to an environment of inclusion and possibility that produces fruitful and satisfying results.