

CREATING CHANGE- WHAT MUST BE DONE AND HOW?

By Tyrone Irby, TWS

As racial tensions mount across America, businesses small and large are looking to change course and direction and improve relationships with the black communities they seek to “impact.” Social media posts and full-page newspaper ads have all expressed “outrage” at the violence inflicted upon black Americans lately and they all seek to provide calls for action. The question for most black Americans that are watching (and they are watching): what is the definition of these “calls to action”? The following are seven action steps that can positively change the culture of a company.

Examine Your Current Company Culture of Diversity and Inclusion.

Diversity and Inclusion is more than the percentage of persons of color (POC) that work for your company. It also must consider the origins of your company, how it was built, the percentage of diverse applicants, and your marketing and social media feeds. We call this “company therapy” and as with personal therapy, it can be extremely uncomfortable to look deep inside yourself and your leaders to see the company that you have built.

Take a hard look at your existing team. Do you encourage diverse employees to be who they are without judgment? Do their co-workers respect their opinions and thoughts? Does the company's mission statement highlight that it embraces diversity?

Several companies over the past several years including the Dallas Mavericks, Facebook, and lately The New York Knicks have been literally “called out” for their lack of diversity and inclusion and their unwillingness to change. Changing a company’s culture can be incredibly challenging. The reward of a positive culture, however, is that it will be a source of innovation, creativity, and an overall competitive advantage.

Create Measurables for Change

In all sports there are measurables for success: baseball: batting average or fielding percentage; football: completion percentage or yards per carry; basketball: shooting percentage. Without measurables, there is no way to gauge the success of a program.

A successful diversity and inclusion program must also have measurables that are not likely seen by the naked eye. A great measurable is return business by people of color. How often does your company’s superior service result in another sale to the same consumer? A second measurable is referrals by customers. Again, if a consumer is pleased with your product and level of service (the customer experience), likely they will refer you around their social and professional circle. For small business owners, referrals are a lifeline to build a brand and revenue. A third and particularly effective measurable is a random customer survey. Create an online survey about the customer’s total experience: in store greeting, salesperson demeanor, product inventory, salesperson knowledge, store décor, social media channels, and follow up. Bridgette Brennan’s book *Why She Buys* is a classic on what

women especially expect in a sales interaction. The survey should also include demographic information (gender, ethnicity, etc....)

Ask the Right Questions, and Listen and Learn

Hiring to create the right culture is more challenging than ever. To create the environment of acceptance and inclusion, you must be incredibly careful who you hire. How to do that? Ask the right questions.

Do not just ask about past employment but delve into the background of your prospective hires, search for biases, review their histories, and search their social media channels. If you have a question about a public post, feel free to ask it. Social media should be a large part of the interview process as most posts socially are unfiltered. Pay attention to what you see and what you hear because likely it is true.

Prepare a diversity and inclusion survey for the hire. Ask the prospective hire about inclusive working environments, working with different cultural backgrounds, and the importance of leadership in diversity. Listen very closely to the responses.

Leaders Must Walk the Walk and Talk the Talk

Change comes from the top down. As a leader, you must be able to not only demonstrate your ability to change but also your ability to lead the change. We all suffer from blind spots in our thinking and in building relationships. That itself is a challenge. Acknowledging your faults (biases) and seeking guidance is a key to developing your own awareness and accepting your limitations. Leaders must be accountable.

Leaders must be prepared to make changes in both their personal and professional lives. Initiate and participate in conversations with other industry leaders. Create group discussions involving a diverse and inclusive group. If you are in the majority, it is exceedingly difficult to see and hear the perspectives of the minority. More than anything, be willing to listen and learn.

Create A Mission Statement About Diversity and Inclusion

Most companies have a mission statement. Either revise your statement or create a new one and address your strategy for a diverse and inclusive environment. Email the statement to all current and potential clients. Consider asking for their input. Present a copy to your current employees. Post it on all your social media feeds. Post it inside your location. Post it on all receipts and invoices. Make sure everyone that currently does business with you or plans to do business with you is aware of your commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Your mission statement should create a conversation with clients, employees, and on social media. Ask for recommendations on what you can do better as a company. How you can become more inclusive and learn more about the communities you serve.

Increase the Investment in Diversity and Inclusion Training Programming

Create time for training programs to improve understanding about diversity and inclusion. This is not a one and done, but should be a series of discussions and should be led by someone outside of the leadership team. Diversity and inclusion is a very evolving subject and layers upon layers of information are needed to properly address it. Consider holding monthly 30-60-minute sessions to discuss current events along with inhouse situations that are relevant.

The goal of each session should be to address questions and certain subjects. Everyone should be comfortable addressing their peers and leadership regarding any communication issues that arise. Every opinion should be listened to and valued. Dynamics of inclusion change daily with new information and new strategies. What worked in 2019 may not work in 2020. In addition, set measurable goals for these sessions.

Give Power to the Employees to Create Their Culture

Create an employee oversight committee to address concerns and biases amongst themselves. Employees are freer to discuss sensitive issues without the specter of management in the room. Employees work best when they feel included and their concerns are listened to. The goal must be inclusion, empowerment, and respect.

During committee meetings, ask questions amongst each other. Educate each other on how a person feels by an insult or slight-handed comments. Identify slights and biases. Recognize them. Try to understand where they come from. Learn to accept your behaviors before they can be changed. Try role playing to see different perspectives.

A Call to Action is just like it sounds, a CALL to ACTION. There are thousands of companies that have inferred actions regarding diversity and inclusion, but few have developed a coherent plan and taken steps for execution.