SPARK CHANGE.
SPEAK UP.

INTRO TO INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP
Inclusive Leadership

In order to foster and maintain a culture of inclusivity within an organization, leadership must first become more inclusive. Inclusive leadership may be defined as the processes of social influence that strives to value and respect everyone involved in achieving a goal. Inclusive leaders have a tremendous impact on their employees and organization. Employees who work with a leader who demonstrates inclusive practices are more likely to feel engaged in their work and with their colleagues, and more likely to produce positive outcomes for their company. In short: When employees are happy it is reflected through their productivity.

What’s the Difference Between Diversity and Inclusion?

Diversity

A diverse workplace is one in which a variety of people from numerous backgrounds work.

Inclusion

An inclusive workplace is one in which various policies and practices recognize and celebrate those differences presented by a diverse workforce. In an inclusive workplace, everyone has equitable or tailored access to opportunities of advancement, success, and safety.
The difference between diversity and inclusion may also be thought of this way: Imagine a varied group of people are invited to a dinner party. As dinner is served, only some of those invited are called to the table to eat. Sure, the environment is diverse, but only a few of the attendees are actively engaged in the intended activity, or only a few may actually consume what is served due to dietary or accessibility restrictions. Now, imagine the same situation, but when dinner is served everyone is called to the table, accommodations for specific diets and accessibility needs are made, and no one is served until everyone is seated. This is inclusion.

Inclusive leaders ensure that everyone has equitable access to a safe, productive, and fulfilling work environment.

SELF-AWARENESS

According to Jennifer Brown, a world-renowned diversity and inclusion expert, to become an inclusive leader, one must navigate four stages of the Inclusive Leadership Continuum. This continuum navigates a path of self-awareness and action:

- **Unaware**: Leaders who are just coming to understand there is an issue surrounding inclusion in the workplace.
- **Aware**: Leaders who believe there is work to be done and are aware of their personal and professional shortcomings in the work environment. This leader is conscious of their own problematic thinking or actions.
- **Active**: Leaders who are ready to move personal work into public action and is actively taking the steps to do so.
- **Advocate**: Leaders who are truly advancing the cause of inclusivity at both interpersonal and institutional levels.
Becoming an inclusive leader requires significant degrees of both humility and self-awareness. It takes a considerable amount of humility to be introspective and self-critical. Yet it is through that awareness that a realistic perception of self is developed.

There are two types of awareness:

**Internal self-awareness**

Clearly seeing our own thoughts, actions, and feelings

**External self-awareness**

Clearly understanding how others perceive us

It is not before internal and external self-awareness are developed that a leader may hope to create a more inclusive work environment.

**LEADERSHIP SELF ASSESSMENT**

It may be difficult for a leader to objectively assess or conceive a full idea of who they are, or how they are perceived. Luckily there are a few ways to help this process along, one being a self-assessment quiz. Take one such quiz below:

(These questions are based on this video by communication coach Alex Lyon: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKBUS5JZN9c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKBUS5JZN9c))
1. Look at your past experiences and projects.

Reflect on what type of work and projects you have done over the course of your work experience. What did you like most? The least? What kind of work or tasks matches your leadership style best?

2. Make a list of strengths and weaknesses.

Being as objective as possible, identify your strengths and weaknesses as a leader. Do you overlook important details? Do you leave people out of meetings, conversations, or opportunities to collaborate? Are you a strong listener? Are you disorganized? Do you thrive or crumble under pressure?

Understanding how you operate professionally will give you a better sense of how to navigate your professional experiences, an opportunity to more effectively mitigate and manage stressors, and identify areas in which personal growth and professional development may be warranted.

3. What motivates you? What drains you?

Think of things that get you excited about jumping out of bed to go to work in the morning. Is it collaborating with others, or completing an arduous task after weeks of working on it? Perhaps it’s having a clean inbox at the end of the week. Now think about what has the opposite effect. Do you drag your feet to staff meetings or avoid conference calls altogether? Does interpersonal conflict tend to ruin your entire week?
Being familiar with which elements have particular effects on you may help you tailor your work experience and the culture in your workplace.

4. What past feedback have you received?

What have others said to you regarding your performance, conduct, and demeanor in the workplace? How have you used said feedback proactively? Reflect.

5. Ask for feedback now.

Ask a trusted colleague, supervisor, family member, or friend for constructive feedback and criticism based on their interactions with you. Be sure to be a good listener, take notes, and ask follow up questions. Do your best to not get defensive as some of the feedback may be difficult to hear. This is not an opportunity to incite conflict or fight, but is a chance to learn more about yourself, to grow, and to better yourself both personally and professionally.

6. How do you respond to stressful situations, criticism or conflict, and increased workloads?

How would you assess your response to adversity in the workplace? Do you tend to fight, flight, or freeze?

**How does this response impact the efficacy of your leadership and how you are perceived by your team?**
There are six understood characteristics that inclusive leaders generally exhibit:

Derived from: [https://deloitte.wsj.com/articles/6-characteristics-of-inclusive-leaders-1463083402](https://deloitte.wsj.com/articles/6-characteristics-of-inclusive-leaders-1463083402)

1. **Commitment** - Leaders should hold themselves and others accountable, as well as possess a strong sense of personal responsibility for inciting change within their organization. Leaders can signal true devotion to change when they commit time, energy, and resources toward its priority.

2. **Courage** - Inclusive leaders are courageous in that they do not shy away from entrenched workplace attitudes that are exclusionary or homogenous, even when it proves unpopular or difficult. They are also not afraid to be vulnerable, express humility in their acknowledgement of their own limitations, or to seek contributions from others.

3. **Cognizance of bias** - Inclusive leaders are aware of their own biases both personally and professionally. These limitations preclude such leaders from making objective decisions. It is only when they acknowledge and actively work to curtail the outward and organizational effects of such biases that they might step in the direction of creating a more inclusive environment.
4. Curiosity - Curiosity and open-mindedness are crucial traits of inclusive leadership. Leaders must strive to expose themselves to experiences and realities that differ from their own, as well as seek to develop deeper understanding of non-dominant, more diverse viewpoints. Curiosity in this context involves active listening, respectful questioning, self-education, and frequent requests for feedback. Each of these provide a leader with the opportunity to synthesize ideas, policies, and workflows that make others feel valued, respected, and represented. Snap decisions that do not consider the elements listed above are colored with bias and are often executed in an exclusionary manner.

5. Cultural intelligence - Both in the workplace and in personal contexts, knowledge of other cultures, perspectives, and realities is essential for inclusive leaders. This helps to ensure that an appropriate and deserved degree of respect and understanding is fostered and maintained throughout professional decorum. For example, leaders who are frequently gregarious, extroverted, and perceived as outgoing will temper such behaviors when doing business with those whose cultures value modesty. Or, leaders will offer and ask for personal pronouns and honor those pronouns in conversation, emails, etc. Such leaders possess the self-awareness of how their own culture is perceived and how it factors into their engagement and perception of their professional world, too.
6. **Collaboration** - When inclusivity becomes an engrained practice of an organization, their product and messaging also become inherently inclusive. At the heart of the sentiment is collaboration. Inclusive leaders value collaborative work environments where all voices and perspectives are heard and considered. Such leaders pay close attention to workflow and team composition, and prevent employees from forming sub-groups or cliques. They understand that the homogenization of production creates stale results that lack ingenuity, creates conflict, and ostracizes non-dominant team members. They value both the totality and individuality of the team’s knowledge and capabilities.

**UNDERSTANDING BIAS**

Bias may be defined as prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair. Whether we like it or not, recognize it or not, each of us holds certain biases that influence our judgements, behaviors, relationships, and navigation of the world around us. Biases are developed, both consciously and unconsciously, through our processes of development throughout every stage of our lives. Our biases may very well be complicit in the mistreatment and harm of those around us, particularly those of marginalized and minoritized status. There are two types of bias:

**IMPLICIT BIAS AND EXPLICIT BIAS.**
Implicit bias describes stereotypes and attitudes we hold towards people without our awareness or conscious knowledge. Examples of implicit bias are gendered or racial stereotypes:

- Women are more emotional than men
- Black men are likely to be criminals
- Asian people excel in science and math

Explicit bias may be viewed as an enhanced and more direct version of bias in that they are attitudes or stereotypes that we are aware of and perpetuate ourselves; willfully engaging in harmful and unfair thinking, actions, or practices. Examples of explicit bias include, but are not limited to:

- Overt racism or racist comments
- The denial of promotions or equity in pay
- Homophobic, transphobic, or otherwise derogatory statements, slurs, or remarks
Bias often manifests itself into forms of discrimination in the workplace. Employees from non-dominant groups or classes may become victims of subtle or overt discrimination.

**Subtle discrimination** may rear its head by intentional exclusion. For example: Colleagues may go out for a beer after work but intentionally do not ask an employee of a non-dominant class to join them. Or perhaps the same employees have “in jokes” or use language that subtly excludes the person because they are different.

**Overt discrimination**, on the other hand, might look like the denial of participation in a work project, a promotion or otherwise fair compensation, preventing a person from being able to excel or succeed because they do not belong to the dominant class.

**OVERT DISCRIMINATION MAY ALSO TAKE THE FORM OF HARASSMENT, MAKING FUN OF SOMEONE’S APPEARANCE, GENDER PRONOUNS, OR OTHER PERSONAL OR DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS.**
Equity in the Workplace

Equity is one of those words that is often thrown around without much consideration regarding what it actually means or how it looks in practice.

**EQUITY REFERS TO UNBIASED TREATMENT AND MEETING OF PEOPLE—THEIR NEEDS AND SITUATIONS—WHERE THEY ARE.**

An equitable approach to inclusion in the workplace accepts that some groups have more advantages than others and offers varying levels of support, resources, and accessibility based on employee need. Equity is not synonymous with equality (treating everyone the same, without discrimination).

Assessing bias

Harvard University has developed a series of free, comprehensive, and effective Implicit Association Tests (IAT) that range in topics from gender, sexuality, age, race, religion, and disability. These tests may be helpful in providing an objective and unbiased framework by which to measure implicit biases.

These tests may be found here: [https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/selectatest.html](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/selectatest.html)
As employees differ in age, gender, sexual orientation, race, and ability, so do their needs and desires in the workplace. Equality in the workplace would look like providing everyone a uniform, or a new pair of shoes, but each of those is only in the most common size of the dominant group. Technically, everyone received the same thing, and the treatment could be perceived as equal. However, clearly not everyone will be able to wear what has been provided,

**SO WHAT WAS “EQUAL” ACTUALLY LEAVES PEOPLE OUT.**

Equity, on the other hand, would involve taking the time and effort to request sizes and measurements of each employee and procuring uniform garments accordingly.

**AN INCLUSIVE LEADER STRIVES TO CHALLENGE THEIR OWN BIAS, THE INEQUITIES OF THE INSTITUTION IN WHICH THEY SERVE AS A LEADER, AND HARBOR A WORK ENVIRONMENT OF ACCEPTANCE AND BELONGING.**
EQUITY & INCLUSION: WHERE TO START

It is no simple task to identify where to begin in creating a more inclusive and equitable business or organization. However, there are a few crucial elements that may help the process along. Such implementation should not merely be spread by word of mouth or exist as an unspoken expectation. It should be codified in company or organizational policy as an invaluable and unwavering component to the foundation of workplace culture. By making clear the values of the company, branch, or department, all employees should make no mistake about the expectations for behavior and treatment of fellow coworkers.
Gender-neutral restrooms

One way to ensure employees who identify as transgender or non-binary feel seen, respected, and welcome in their work environment is to provide facilities that are gender-neutral, meaning that they do not require someone to identify as a specific gender to use them. Traditionally, restrooms have maintained strict adherence to the male/female gender binary. Offering only these two choices requires employees who may not identify as male or female, are non-binary, or are trans-men or trans-women to make a difficult choice about which restroom to use. Requiring employees to make that choice can expose them to questions, criticism, or harassment from coworkers, or even face threats to their employment or safety. It is the responsibility of an employer to ensure the safety and comfort of their employees, and this is one small step toward creating a safer work environment.

EMPLOYEES WHO FEEL WELCOME AND RESPECTED TEND TO EXPERIENCE MORE WORKPLACE SATISFACTION, ARE LESS LIKELY TO LEAVE THEIR JOBS, AND ARE MORE LIKELY TO ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO WORK THERE BASED SOLELY ON THESE INCLUSIVE EFFORTS.
Inclusive hiring

Studies have shown that hiring processes yield decisions in favor of dominant group members to the disadvantage of non-dominant ones. Research has shown that applicants with white-sounding names like John or Jennifer are received more favorably than those with non-white sounding names such as Tanisha, José, or Tong, despite identical qualifications and experience.

As biases like these are difficult to identify and overcome, organizations must commit to recognizing and managing implicit bias in their operations, especially their hiring practices. As previously discussed, organizational leaders must strive to be cognizant of bias and self-aware of their own privileges in their position. They must choose to continue questioning and educating themselves, and may choose to take a data-driven approach in identifying existing inequitable practices and disparities within their institution.

Additionally, blind decision-making in the recruitment and screening process frequently yields positive outcomes. This method attempts to mitigate implicit bias by reducing or eliminating prejudice-prompting cues. Through taking a blind approach, employers are able to find the most qualified and best suited candidates for their organizations without the shadow of personal or organizational biases clouding the process.
Equitable and inclusive meetings

Staff meetings can be difficult to both lead and attend. Employees who feel as though their voice is not heard or their ideas are not respected are more likely to feel despondent or disengaged while in these meetings, and ultimately tend to stop contributing.

Organizational leaders can help curb these feelings and reactions by ensuring each employee gets a chance to speak if desired, and being careful not to give certain employees more attention or favor than others.

These practices require an adequate sense of self-awareness. Leaders should ask themselves the following questions:

- Am I acknowledging employees in an equitable fashion?
- Am I respecting and taking seriously the contributions of others?
- Am I leaving room for spontaneity?
- Do participants feel respected and engaged?
- As the facilitator, am I receptive to feedback and input?
Name Pronunciation

Author and inclusivity advocate Ruchika Tulshyan maintains the assertion that learning to pronounce a colleague’s name properly is not merely a common courtesy, but an important effort in creating an inclusive work environment. The name Ruchika, for example, falls under the category of non-dominant, non-Anglo-Saxon names that many, if not most Americans, would have a difficult time pronouncing on sight. She suggests that others with similarly unique names find ways to anticipate and manage instances where their names might be mispronounced.


Honoring pronouns

So many elements of the language we use are gendered, meaning they ascribe a gender - typically along a heteronormative male/female binary - to their subject. Personal pronouns are no exception. Personal or gender pronouns are utilized in language as a placeholder for people’s names. These identifying markers have, in recent history, remained aligned along the constructs of the gender binary. Unfortunately, as commonplace as pronouns are, the gendered implications they may hold are not always helpful or accurate when considering the myriad of realities, perspectives, and truths held by people around the world and their unique and individual identities.
Assuming gender or misgendering someone via incorrect pronouns may unintentionally send an unwelcoming or harmful message regarding the expectation of gender normativity. It may also demonstrate that counter-normative identities may be viewed as unworthy of respect and acknowledgement, or be altogether unacceptable. Misgendering someone also implies that a person must look a certain way to demonstrate or express a particular gender. External or physical characteristics, attire, or affectations are not an accurate representation or indication of how someone may identify. It is best to clarify pronouns before making an assumption purely based on superficial attributes.

**Utilizing Someone’s Correct Pronouns is One of the Most Basic Ways to Indicate Visibility and Respect and Serves to Promote a More Inclusive Environment.**
**How might gender pronouns be respected?**

Even if your gender pronouns align with the binary, you may take the following steps to ensure that you indicate to others that you respect their pronouns and identities:

- Include pronouns in all introductions - Whether it is in conversations or email signatures, offering your pronouns to others indicates the intention to honor and respect theirs.

- Ask others for their pronouns - Gender pronouns are not private or secret and are, by design, meant to be utilized by others. Keep it simple and ask in one of the following ways:
Be sure to continue this practice even if you have been previously introduced to a person’s pronouns. Pronouns and gender identity are fluid and may change or evolve from your last introduction.

When someone shares their pronouns, whether it be he/him, she/her, they/them, or any number of others (and there are MANY), they are **ENGAGING IN AN ACT OF TRUST AND MUTUAL RESPECT PREDICATED ON THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THEIR IDENTITY WILL BE HONORED.**

Though pronouns may be confusing to incorporate into everyday life at first, it truly doesn’t take long to incorporate the inclusive practice of understanding and honoring them. If even one employee feels seen and respected by this, it is worth the effort and the attempt at creating a more inclusive work environment.

For a more in-depth guide to understanding and honoring the use of pronouns, visit: [https://www.mypronouns.org/](https://www.mypronouns.org/)
The claim of “color blindness” as a harmful construct

The phrase “color blind” was coined and broadly disseminated during and following the civil rights movement to indicate that skin color or race was irrelevant in an ideal society. While the intent behind this phrase was at the time useful and significant, it has now outlived its usefulness. In truth, ignoring the differences between each person’s traits that make them unique and individual is an egregious injustice. When we don’t recognize such differences, we begin to treat all people equally rather than equitably.

The claim of color blindness, at both the personal and institutional levels, offers a convenient avenue through which to avoid addressing inequities and injustices enduring in modernity. While a lofty and noble concept, the color blindness side-step attempts to press an invisible and non-existent reset button on the torrid and abhorrent systems of oppression, atrocities, and cultural devastation perpetrated by dominant classes of our society.

The injuries from these still linger, scarcely healed, in the heart of our society.
An institution or leader that regards themselves as “color blind” is not one that places a primacy or priority on inclusivity. They would rather dismiss the topic altogether, minimizing the uniqueness of individuality, ancestry, and experience.

Correspondingly, race, color, perspective, and experience should be honored by an inclusive leader, organization, and society. Such leaders and organizations strive to understand their team’s intersectionality.

**THEY LEAN IN AND CELEBRATE CULTURE AND INDIVIDUALITY IN MEANINGFUL WAYS.**

Difficult conversations with employees

Safety is crucial in the work environment. While an employer may trust their employees, is that sentiment reciprocated? If employees do not feel as though they can trust their managers or other leaders, they are less likely to speak candidly or extemporaneously about interpersonal matters, such as conflicts with colleagues or matters of discrimination or prejudice in the workplace.
Employees are more likely to voluntarily approach leaders who convey their earnest efforts in creating an inclusive workplace. Such voluntary action typically signifies the willingness to engage in meaningful conflict resolution, mediation, or other situational remedies rather than engage in reclusive or avoidant behavior. Leaders must realize that in many cases, conversations involving topics of discrimination or other workplace oppressions are extremely difficult for members of non-dominant or minoritized groups to engage.

**IF AN EMPLOYEE DOES NOT FEEL AS THOUGH THEIR LEADER OR SUPERVISOR WILL TREAT THEM OR THEIR SITUATION FAIRLY, IN CONFIDENCE, AND WITH COMPASSION, THE LINE OF TRUST AND COMMUNICATION IS BROKEN BEFORE IT HAS EVEN BEGUN.**
WHAT DOES THE OPTIMAL WORK ENVIRONMENT LOOK LIKE?

Do employees, staff or volunteers enjoy working in that environment, or are they so stressed out over productivity or profits they hardly smile?

Do they feel engaged, respected, and comfortable in the workplace, or do they dread showing up each day?

Are they able to express themselves in the most authentic way in the office, or do they conceal parts of their lives?

Are hiring practices diverse and equitable, or has a homogenous and stale environment been created?

The answers to these questions likely reflect the degree of diversity and inclusivity fostered within this work environment. Research shows that employees who work within an inclusive workspace are generally MORE SATISFIED WITH THEIR EXPERIENCES, ENJOY INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY, AND ARE ULTIMATELY MORE PROFITABLE.
Employees in more inclusive work environments:

- Are more engaged in their work
- Are more collaborative
- Communicate more effectively
- Make better decisions
- Openly express their opinions
- Are more innovative
- Are more creative
- Manage risk better
- Are better able to resolve interpersonal conflicts
- Are able to have more positive working relationships with leaders
- Are less likely to miss work (reduced absenteeism)
- Are less likely to leave their job
- Are more likely to recommend their employer to other people

These traits are a direct result of the tendency inclusive practices have to foster environments of respect, trust, and accountability. When employees feel respected, trusted, and accountable for their actions, fear and intimidation become less and less apparent.
Michael C. Bush speaks to the importance of happiness at work in his TED feature, *This is What Makes Employees Happy at Work*. Though he does not directly name inclusivity in this piece, he speaks to trust, and more importantly, respect. Respect and inclusion are inextricably linked. As exclusionary practices are a show of disrespect and harm, inclusive practices broadcast precisely the opposite. Diversity and inclusion are oft-utilized buzzwords floating loftily around the professional ether. Their implementation necessitates much more than the mere distribution of handbook policy, memos, or the once-or-twice-a-year Diversity Equity Inclusion (DEI) training scratched through with a supervisor’s initials. Workplace inclusion takes work.

**IT BEGINS AT THE TOP.**

**IT STARTS WITH INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP.**
THE NEXT STEPS ARE UP TO YOU

As a business owner, manager, or employee, what happens next is up to you. No matter your level, you can always do your best to encourage an equitable and inclusive work environment. If you’re an employee, encourage your management to seek educational materials like this one. If you’re a business leader, it’s your responsibility to put into action the concepts in this document.

If you’d like assistance creating a more equitable workplace, but aren’t sure where or how to start, please contact Inclusive Idaho.
SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL:

The following materials are compiled as resources aimed to assist in the expansion of personal and professional knowledge and development.

On White Privilege:
White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack - Peggy McIntosh (1989)
White privilege definition: Inherent advantages possessed by a white person on the basis of their race in a society characterized by racial inequality and injustice.

On “Color-Blindness:”
Color Blindness is Counterproductive - Adia Harvey Wingfield | The Atlantic (2015)

On Gender:
Doing Gender - Candace West, Don H. Zimmerman (1987)
Gender definition: Either the male or female division of a species, especially as differentiated by social and cultural roles and behavior.

Toilets, bowties, gender and me | Audrey Mason-Hyde
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NCLoNwVJA-0

On Intersectionality:
https://youtu.be/OiisIM0ytkJE
Intersectionality definition: The theory that the overlap of various social identities, such as race, gender, sexuality, and class, contributes to the specific type of systemic oppression and discrimination experienced by an individual.
On Heterosexism:
Heterosexism definition: A prejudiced attitude or discriminatory practices against gay people by heterosexuals.

On Sexual Orientation:
https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbtq/sexual-orientation
Sexual orientation definition: One’s inherent attraction to a sexual partner of a certain gender, or the absence of gender preference in a sexual relationship; one’s identity as asexual, bisexual, heterosexual, gay, pansexual, etc.

On Ableism:
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6488478/
Ableism definition: The tendency to regard people with a disability as incomplete, diminished, or damaged, and to measure the quality of life with a disability against a nondisabled standard.