



MANAGER STRATEGIES **from**

“Embrace the Power of You: Owning Your Identity at Work”

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Chapter 1

Take a look at who is on your leadership team.

There is a saying that goes: “You can’t be what you can’t see.” If your leadership team is lacking representation at the top, then it is hard for those from underrepresented groups to feel like they can rise. Be intentional about increasing diversity at the highest level of the organization. One CEO I spoke with told me that, to ensure a broad range of candidates is considered for a given position, she required every job opening to have a diverse slate of qualified candidates before they went forward with any single candidate in the interview process. That way, the company made sure that no candidate was unfairly moving ahead.

Expand your social circles.

In her book *The 7 Simple Habits of Inclusive Leaders*, author Melissa Majors reminds us that inclusive leaders recognize the influence their social circles may have over their viewpoints. Are your social circles all of the same race, gender, ethnicity, economic class and sexual orientation? If the majority of your

social circles look and think similarly, then you likely have blind spots in regard to the experiences of others. If that is the case, acknowledge it, expand your circles and work on being open to the validity of others' experiences, even if it challenges your closely held beliefs.

Notice who is not speaking during a meeting.

Oftentimes, one or two voices will dominate a conversation. This makes it hard for others to contribute. In a group discussion, intentionally involve everyone, especially the less vocal. You can encourage contrarian ideas by asking, "Why will this idea not work?"

Chapter 2

Develop an inclusion mindset

Author Ruchika Tulshyan tells us that inclusion isn't an inborn trait. It takes awareness, intention and regular practice. She has created a memorable acronym—BRIDGE—to approach cultivating an inclusion mindset for leaders:

- Be uncomfortable.
- Reflect (on what you don't know).
- Invite feedback.
- Defensiveness doesn't help.
- Grow from your mistakes.
- Expect that change takes time.

Conduct unconscious bias training at your company.

Many times, people do not know that the things they say or do are offending another person. The first step is to educate your employees about unconscious bias. Consider conducting company-wide unconscious bias training so that employees can begin the journey of becoming more aware of their personal biases and belief systems.

Don't call it a "diversity hire" or "diversity quota."

This will backfire on you. If your employees are feeling like they were hired to simply "check the box" they will not have a sense of belonging. Characterizing recruiting in this manner also undermines the skills and qualifications of a diverse candidate when they join the organization. Right from the start, they will feel like they have to hustle a little bit harder to prove they belong in the room. Instead, frame your recruiting efforts like this: you want to hire the most qualified person for the position—who is also diverse, making them even more qualified because of their unique perspective. Make it clear that you are not lowering your standards.

Don't "other" your diverse employees

With the pressure to diversify the workforce, many companies are updating their website to showcase their latest DEI efforts. That is good, until you start asking your very few diverse employees to pose for pictures for the corporate website. This makes your diverse employees feel used and further highlights their "otherness." And if your company is not diverse and has a long way to go, be honest about where you are at on DEI as a company and commit to doing better.

Chapter 3 – Hiding in Plain Sight

Proactively commemorate different cultural or religious celebrations.

Learn about what different ethnicities, cultures, identities or religions may be celebrating at any given time during the year and be curious about it. Don't just observe Christmas and Easter.

Conduct regular check-ins with your employees

Regularly ask your employees how they are feeling—really feeling—particularly during times of change, transition or social unrest. For example, if your employee is about to go out on parental leave, check in on them and see how it's going without waiting for them to come to you when they need to adjust their hours to accommodate new childcare responsibilities. Be proactive and ask them what you can do to support them during this major life transition.

Don't ignore what's happening in the outside world

If there are events of violence in the news based on race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity for example, check in on your employees who are part of that identity. They may be suffering silently and in need of some space to process the event. Don't expect them to show up at a meeting with a smile on their face, excited to give you their weekly report (although they likely will).

Instead, proactively ask whether they may need some extra time on any assignments or some time off to process the events of the day. This one small gesture will make your employee feel seen and connected to your organization.

Chapter 4 – You are Enough

Create a “Storytelling Hour” at your company

It can be held monthly, quarterly or during certain cultural awareness events. It is especially important to encourage executives or other senior leaders to participate and tell their stories. Everyone has had to overcome something hard in their lives, and simply hearing that others have faced adversity and that you are not alone can make all the difference. The more vulnerable the leader, the stronger the culture will be.

Establish Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)

Create a safe place for employees to support each other through ERGs and similar communities. Ensure that the ERGs you create have sufficient budget to plan activities and gather. ERG-sponsored events are a great place for employees to share their stories.

Enlist executive sponsorship for ERGs

Consider having an executive who does not identify with a particular group sponsor that ERG. For example, at one company, the male CEO became the executive sponsor for the Mom’s ERG, and got to hear first-hand from working mothers about the struggles of juggling work and family life. This gave him more insight and empathy when it came time for the annual review of health benefits and parental leave policies. This approach gives executives an opportunity to learn about an identity they were not previously familiar with—something that can lead to meaningful change within an organization.

Ensure that the executive team is actively involved in your DEI initiatives.

Many companies feel like all they have to do is hire a head of diversity and then their DEI problem is solved. Nothing is further from the truth. As Dr. Gena Cox tells us in her book *Leading Inclusion*, it is

essential that the members of your executive team, especially the CEO, are actively involved in all aspects of the program in order for it to be successful. Employees are looking for executive teams who are genuinely examining their workplace, doing the work and making positive changes—not just window dressing.

Chapter 5 – Belonging Begins with Self-Acceptance

Embrace imperfection

The best managers are the ones who don't shy away from their mistakes but instead learn from them. As a leader, if you are able to be vulnerable and show your imperfection, then others around you will let go of the need to be perfect and be more willing to take risks that are good for the company.

Create a culture of trust

Be honest and transparent with your employees. If you try to hide the truth or pretend something is not happening, people always know. Creating a culture of inclusivity begins with building a culture of trust. Tell the truth, even if the truth is not pretty.

Practice active listening

When a person of color or from another underrepresented identity approaches you with their concerns about how they are feeling excluded, stop and listen. Oftentimes they are experiencing things that you are not aware of, so it may be hard for you to believe it. You may find yourself coming up with all sorts of reasons for why it is not true or how they are misinterpreting it, but remember: unconscious bias is just that—unconscious. Co-workers who treat you wonderfully may be unwittingly treating someone else poorly. It is your job to actively listen when someone shares their concerns. As a member of the Black community once told me, “Just believe us.”

Chapter 6 – What’s in your Toolbox

Establish a mentorship program at your company

Mentors are a great way for employees to learn and grow. A great example of a well-run mentorship program is the Fast Track initiative at venture capital firm First Round. This ninety-day experience pairs hundreds of tech leaders with high-potential operators, using a structured format that includes professional development sessions with subject matter experts, networking opportunities, guidance on questions to explore during one-to-one sessions, and a feedback loop.

Be a sponsor

Employees often ask me, “How can I find a sponsor?” I tell them that you don’t pick a sponsor, a sponsor finds you. As a leader, you have a wonderful opportunity to sponsor someone. A note of caution here. We tend to gravitate to people that are just like us. Be careful that you are not only sponsoring people who are similar to you. Employees from underrepresented groups have fewer people like them in leadership positions so have fewer opportunities for sponsorship. Find that high-potential employee, and invest in them.

Create a community

You can create a variety of communities within your company. Many companies now use applications like Slack to help create internal communities that are safe spaces where employees can share stories and resources and generally connect.

Examine your own efforts

Your employees are doing their work. Now, what are you doing to learn more about your diverse employees? What are you reading or listening to educate yourself about others who are different from you? Are you getting out of the way and giving credit to those who deserve it? Are you amplifying voices who have been historically silenced? Are you letting others speak instead of dominating the conversation? Examine your behavior.

Chapter 7 – When to Choose Yourself

Don't place the entire burden of DEI on your underrepresented employees

This group tends to be the ones that step up first because they are the most impacted, but this is the exact demographic you are trying to support. By trying to run a DEI program “on the side,” these employees jeopardize their ability to succeed, or to take on stretch projects. Instead, invest in a dedicated person to run your DEI programs.

Be an ally

Allyship is a verb. It requires action. It is not just talking about workplace equity, it is actively interrupting bias, and advocating for the underrepresented when they are not in the room. To help spread this understanding, offer allyship training that provides your managers with the tools they need to show up as an effective ally.

Talk openly about mental health

Mental health issues still have tremendous stigma and employees may feel reluctant to ask for help. The more managers talk about their own bouts of struggle, the more employees can be honest about theirs.

Consider mental health breaks that apply to your entire group or organization, rather than forcing individual employees to ask for them. For example, you could launch “no-meeting Fridays” or “no-meeting lunch hours.”

Support employees on medical leave

If an employee needs to take medical leave for things such as a mental health issue, elder care, or the loss of a loved one, they are going through a lot. Consider giving them paid time off so that they can attend to these matters without added financial stress. When they return, check in to see what kind of support they need to transition back to work, such as fewer hours at first. In the end, your employees simply want to feel seen and heard. If you can be there for them in their darkest hour, they will reward you with loyalty and commitment.

Chapter 8 – Hiding Only Serves You for So Long

Expect different opinions

If you hire a more diverse workforce, expect that you will get different opinions than you had before. Welcome these conversations rather than stifle or ask why they can’t “just agree with everyone else.” Instead, ask things like “Who has an idea that is opposite of what we have been discussing?” to make diverse perspectives the norm rather than the exception.

Pronouns matter

People use language and pronouns as a way to affirm their identity. As such, using the correct pronouns when referring to someone is very important. Use generic pronouns such as they/them before making any gender assumptions.

Give employees space to process emotions

Employees from underrepresented groups may have additional feelings of sadness, anger, frustration or stress that you may not experience. For example, if there is rising anti-Asian sentiment, expect that your Asian American employees are quietly suffering. Find ways to lighten work deliverables during these times and allow some time to process the tragedies of the day. Be conscious that these sorts of events may impact certain communities differently than they impact you.

Take responsibility for past missteps

We are all human and we are going to mess up. The important part is taking accountability when it happens. Instead of denying, defending, or hoping it will blow over, acknowledge that you made a mistake, take responsibility for your actions and learn how you can do things differently. It starts by saying things like:

- “I am sorry. I made a mistake and didn’t realize how this would impact you.”
- “Will you help me? I want to get better.”
- “Can you teach me? I am willing to learn.”

Chapter 9 – The Power of Revealing Your Authentic Self

Initiate courageous conversations

Don’t be afraid to ask questions. Once, a manager told me how he had misinterpreted an employee’s behavior during a meeting. The employee, who was from Asia, was looking at the floor while the manager was speaking to her. He took her behavior as not caring, but the opposite was true. She was showing respect for his seniority in a way that is customary in Asia. Instead of making assumptions

based on your own life experiences, be open and curious and ask questions about cultural norms. Be willing to have a courageous conversation about things you may not understand.

Step back

The greatest gift you can give someone who feels invisible is the opportunity to be seen. Resist the urge to speak for them, dominate the conversation or explain an idea on their behalf. Instead, pass the mic, give them proper attribution and don't take credit for work they did. By simply stepping back and giving them the stage, you are signaling that you value what they bring to the table.

Be kind

I can't tell you how many times people from underrepresented groups have told me that the one thing they wish people would do is simply be kind. That's it. Before you make jokes or comments, pause and consider whether your remarks are potentially offensive to a specific group or identity. You have no idea what is happening in someone's personal life and your words or jokes could be devastating. This is especially true for someone who is trying to muster up the courage to be vulnerable and reveal their whole self at work but finds themselves in an environment that doesn't value or respect their identity.

Chapter 10 – You are a Role Model

Bring your whole self to work

Oftentimes we only bring our professional side to work. But humans are not one-dimensional, we are multi-dimensional—and in today's remote work environment, establishing connection is even more crucial. By bringing your whole self to work, you give permission to your employees to do the same.

Take time off during the day to exercise, rest or meditate, and let everyone know about it. Spend the weekend hiking and generously share those pictures at work. Openly express sadness, fear or

disappointment when you are facing challenging moments. The more vulnerable you are and the more you bring your whole self to work, the more others around you will do the same, and contribute to a culture of belonging.

Be intentional about diversifying your leadership team

Many companies have put in place diversity metrics, but if you peel back the onion you will often see that the numbers at the top are not changing. When you start with diverse leadership, everything flows from there. Diverse leaders are connected into a diverse network, increasing your funnel of qualified candidates. You will also be more successful at recruiting diverse talent if they can see someone like themselves on the leadership team.

Audit your interview process

Is your interview process inclusive enough? Do you have diverse interview panels? Have you reviewed your job descriptions to remove bias or unnecessary qualifications? Are you sourcing from diverse organizations to widen the candidate pool? Have you made your interview space accessible for candidates with disabilities? Be intentional about creating a process that is inclusive of different people and identities. If you have the same people with the same background interviewing candidates, you will receive the same homogenous result. Finally, ensure that all interviewers have training on how to prevent interview bias. We all have biases and we need to learn to recognize and avoid them when making hiring decisions.

To find out more about Tricia and her book, [Embrace the Power of You: Owning Your Identity at Work](#), go to triciatimm.com. You can also contact her at contact@triciatimm.com if you are interested in having her come speak at your organization.