

WORKPLACES THAT WORK: SPOTLIGHT ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

Connect, not correct: *How effective leaders use cultural intelligence*

Research shows diverse teams only outperform homogenous ones when they have what’s called “cultural intelligence.” That’s what enables you to successfully navigate conversations with people who have different perspectives. When implemented between leaders and employees, cultural intelligence boosts retention, collaboration and even profit.

But the problem is most organizations are inadvertently trapped in a cycle of dismissing people’s differences so as not to disrupt the status quo.

So how do we break this cycle so employees feel valued, seen and heard?

For leaders, it starts with understanding your mindset. *The Intercultural Development Inventory® (IDI®)* assesses our level of cultural intelligence within five stages:

- Denial
- Polarization
- Minimization
- Acceptance
- Adaptation

66.8% of the population worldwide is in Minimization. But to better connect with employees of different backgrounds, leaders want to move toward Acceptance.

Here’s an example of Acceptance in action. I spoke with Ralph, the VP of Operations of a rural hospital group. Ralph is a part of just 14% of the population in Acceptance.

In our monthly executive coaching session, he brought up a complaint email to marketing he was copied on. And wanted advice.

In this email, one of the Black doctors on staff expressed frustration about a billboard that depicted just one White doctor.

Ralph, who is White, understood why this doctor was frustrated. He also wondered if the doctor realized the hospital group had other billboards that included doctors of color. He kind of wanted to point that out to him – in effect, to correct him.

By noticing and naming both his own frustration and the doctor’s, Ralph was demonstrating Acceptance.

I asked Ralph if he wanted words to show the respect he feels. He agreed. I suggested he reach out to the doctor to hear and affirm his feelings.

Ralph asked, “Do I say, ‘I understand your perspective but here’s the rest of the story?’”

I said, “The trick is not just saying you understand his perspective, but actually seeking it.”

Ralph wanted words to use. I suggested, “You might say, ‘It sounds like you’re frustrated with marketing. The billboard doesn’t represent the diversity of our hospital staff and the hard work of employees of color. That’s got to be tough.’ Then drop into silence and hear him out.”

“If you seek to connect with him, rather than trying to correct or change his mind, you’ll understand more about his reality. He’ll feel heard. And you’ll know what steps to take next.”

Ralph said, “It’d be a lot easier if he just understood my perspective.” I said, “Absolutely, it’d be easier. It’s opportunities like these that allow your leadership team to bring down communication barriers within the hospitals.

“Because you’re accepting, you can appreciate the doctor is speaking from an emotional place. Probably all too often he has been silenced by White leaders. That’s why I suggested you acknowledge his feelings and experience. You may have to do it several times before he feels truly heard.”

Ralph agreed and later texted, “The conversation went well, at least for me, but I’m not sure how it went for the doctor.”

I texted, “This is the perfect time to lean in and show your genuine interest in him. Call him back and say what you said to me. ‘That conversation went well for me, but how did it impact you?’” Ralph texted a thumbs-up.

Later he called to tell me once he’d checked his impact, the doctor opened up. He explained he had felt sidelined a number of times over the last months; this billboard was the final straw.

He shared how he’d done extra work in medical school to develop his specialty area. The billboard had made him think his work wasn’t worth the trouble. Ralph felt for the guy and told him so. Ralph ended the call by letting the doctor know he didn’t need to bury his feelings anymore. Instead, he can call him so they can address it together.

The doctor thanked Ralph for listening and said he could imagine it must be hard to get complaints.

Ralph realized he may need to get the marketing group to do a better job of communicating internally. But first, he needed to hear how the doctor was impacted. When a person has been historically marginalized, whether that’s



Dr. Amy Narishkin

because of race, gender, age, orientation or ability, leaders discover they’re increasingly more effective when they seek connection with their employees.

Genuine human connection, not correction, allows us to experience more of our own and others’ humanity, increasing engagement and collaboration for everyone in the organization.

Dr. Amy Narishkin is a Cultural Intelligence strategist and consultant currently working with health-care, construction, and manufacturing organizations. To read her blog or request executive coaching, go to www.EmpoweringPartners.com.

Making Diversity, Equity and Inclusion an everyday part of the S. M. Wilson culture

By Jennifer K. Hasamear

S. M. Wilson’s commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) is woven into the fabric of the company’s values and beliefs that each employee embraces and celebrates on a daily basis.

“We believe our varying ethnicities, cultures, genders, ages, levels of experiences, physical abilities and other differences benefit us as individuals and as an organization,” Amy Berg, President, commented in regard to the sense of community and culture throughout the S. M. Wilson family.

S. M. Wilson has a variety of ongoing DEI initiatives including the AGC of America’s Culture of CARE; Wilson Women; #SMWill, a charitable giving initiative; and SKILLED®. S. M. Wilson’s efforts have led to numerous recognitions and continuous industry engagement.

The company’s DEI Council works to help guide, develop and promote these initiatives. Serving as a resource, the members are held accountable for the company’s progress toward reaching goals and the integration of DEI into all aspects of the work at S. M. Wilson.

Culture of CARE

Through the Culture of CARE program we commit to creating safe, welcoming and inclusive work environments that are free from harassment, hazing, and bullying where all members of the team are empowered to succeed and valued for their lived experiences, perspective, and contributions to the project. The four principles are Commit; Attract; Retain and Empower.

“The goal is to create and implement a Culture of CARE plan for every S. M. Wilson project. These plans are

implemented in various ways in collaboration with our field leadership and trades partners. In addition, our DEI Council Members visited several job sites to facilitate Toolbox Talks with our teams,” said Maggie Farrell, Diversity and Human Resources manager of S. M. Wilson.

SKILLED®

Launched in 2019, SKILLED® is Wilson’s Construction Career Education program that provides experiential learning that integrates hands-on activities with a mission to inspire the future of construction and focuses on employment in the A / E / C industry.

In 2022, the program inspired more than 5,000 students; held 28 unique STEAM Education events; 40 Wilsonites assisted in teaching and mentoring programs; hosted 4 high school students through the Summer Shadowing program; gave 13 academic stipends; and hosted 8 college interns.

#SMWill

Through #SMWill, S. M. Wilson invests in communities where we live, work, learn, heal and play by partnering with children and youth service organizations focused on education, encouraging its employees to give their time through volunteering and providing a company match of individual donations to a non-profit organization of their choice.

Last year, S. M. Wilson employees donated 178 hours of community services; committed \$1,700 in matched employed donations; and invested \$40,000 in youth education.

For more information about S. M. Wilson’s DEI initiatives, visit smwilson.com.

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