

8 Major Myths of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) – What Diversity and Inclusion Is Not

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Having worked in the field nearly 29 years now and as President, CEO, of DTG for nearly 25 years, I have confronted these myths over and over and I am constantly debunking them. I often distribute this document prior to a diversity and inclusion-related conversation, forum or training to undo the bias about an upcoming workshop on bias (what I call bias squared).

Myth 1: Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) is a problem. *No, it is an opportunity.* You can't understand and take advantage of something you don't know you don't know (something you don't understand). Your diversity strategy and plan is an opportunity to differentiate your organization from your competition – don't blow it. You often hear “we are in a war for talent” and being an organization that values diversity and is inclusive is an organization that is a “good place to work” for all talent and you will be winners of this war.

Myth 2: D & I is our Human Resource Department's responsibility. *No, it is my responsibility.* Too many people tell me “that's not my problem; our personnel people have to handle the diversity issues.” Wrong. We all (leaders, managers, supervisors and employees) play a significant role. We all have a “shared responsibility” to respect, value, and leverage the diversity of our talented staff and include all of them.

Myth 3: D & I is just about race and gender. *No, it is much broader than that.* I used to be called a “Cultural Diversity Trainer” and then I was a Diversity Trainer and now the conversation is moving to “being more inclusive and belongingness.” Like any field, the conversation, “diversity work” is evolving and advancing.

Myth 4: D & I is just about minorities and women in the workplace. *No, diversity is about your internal (employees) and external (prospective clients) customers.* Understanding the diversity in your employee and customer ranks and anticipating their needs can make or break your organization (most likely break if you subscribe to this myth). Diversity marketing – marketing to new, increasingly diverse “emerging markets” is a growing field.

Myth 5: Diversity is about exclusivity. *No, it is about inclusivity.* In other words, diversity is about all of us. If you feel diversity is about attacking the white male, you are mistaken, and the class you went through was poorly facilitated. Diversity is not about getting “them” into your corporate culture (assimilation). Diversity is about creating a culture where everyone (each individual) can thrive and contribute to your organization (integration/multiculturalism) and serving your increasingly diverse customers.

Myth 6: D & I is about lowering standards. Be very careful with this notion. Many people I have worked with having taken great offense to this perception. My clients are not lowering standards but *widening the net and often raising standards* or rewriting them completely.

Myth 7: D & I is just another fad. If you think it is, good luck. I have heard people say this for 25 years now. Look at your workforce and client marketplace today and compare it with five and ten years ago and try to look five and ten years into the future. Do the same analyses for your customer base. Have you seen the demographic projections for the future? It will blow your socks off! Census 2020 data is coming out and it appears the United States, our workforce, our marketplace is even more diverse now than anyone predicted.

Myth 8: D & I is another version of Equal Employment Opportunity / Affirmative Action. *No, it is very different from EEO/AA.* Diversity concerns all of your employees and your customers and is all-inclusive. Minorities and women are context for EEO/AA: Major differences between EEO/AA and Diversity are:

- EEO/AA is government-initiated while D&I is voluntary and company-driven.
- EEO/AA is also legally-driven while D&I is productivity-driven. EEO/AA is quantitative and D&I is qualitative.
- EEO/AA is problem focused whereas D&I focuses on opportunities.
- EEO/AA assumes assimilation among its participants but D&I assumes inclusion and integration.
- EEO/AA has a strictly internal focus whereas D&I focuses on internal (employees) and external (customer/client) issues.
- EEO/AA is reactive but D&I is proactive.

Well, there you have it – a whole lot to consider. The D & I journey is long and the destination is not a place your organization will get to in the short term. Remember, you need people, passion, purpose, and a plan – what we call at DTG the 4 P's. You have to have the best people, the best minds, and the best talent from all diverse backgrounds. You have to have a real passion for what products or services your organization offers to the marketplace. You have to have a purpose (a mission) and a plan to achieve your purpose – your D & I strategy and plan will do just that.

Last thought – Diversity and Inclusion is about creating and nurturing a workplace culture where all employees thrive and succeed. Where the tide rises and all the boats float up. We are all in this together!

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