

What Is Inclusive Leadership & Why Is It Important?

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What is Inclusive Leadership & Why is it Important?

Unless you have been living under a rock, in the past several years there has been multiple strong social movements based upon the idea that everyone has value and that value needs to be respected (e.g., #metoo movement).

This basic idea has slipped into leadership thought, increasing the need, interest, and promotion of what has been termed “inclusive leadership.”

I want to explain what inclusive leadership is and why it is important. But, before I do, it is important to put the idea into proper context.

Understanding Different Leadership Types or Styles

There are many different ways to categorize effective leadership. For example, transformational, servant, and authentic leadership are a variety of different leadership types or styles that have been proclaimed as being essential for effective leadership.

In reality, these different leadership styles are not entirely different from each other, they are overlapping.

One of the cons associated with distinguishing between overlapping leadership types and styles is that it often leads people to think that they are different, and that one is better or more important than others. The reality is that it is very difficult to find a truly transformational leaders that is not also a servant leader.

But, one of the pros associated with distinguishing between overlapping leadership types and styles is that they provide leaders with the opportunity to focus on developing very specific aspects of their leadership.

In light of that, let's consider what inclusiveness is within a workplace setting and why it is so important.

Inclusiveness

In order for employees to say that they work in an inclusive work environment, they must believe that they are treated fairly, valued for who they are, and included in core decision making.

It is critical that employees feel that they work in an inclusive environment. If employees do not think that their work environment is inclusive (meaning they don't feel they are treated fairly, valued, or included), they are not going to be engaged, committed, or motivated in their job. Without feeling valued or having a voice, they will not feel like they are important or a contributor and will check out.

But, if employees do think that their work environment is inclusive (meaning they feel they are treated fairly, valued, and included), then they are going to be deeply engaged, committed, and motivated. When employees have a voice, and they feel their voice is valued, they will believe that they are an important contributor in the organization. When they believe this, they will be excited about going to work, be more creative, and be more dedicated to fulfilling the mission of the organization, largely because they helped create the mission of the organization.

In fact, when I was with Gallup, I did an analysis to identify which of their Q12 questions was most important for driving engagement. I found that

there were two of the 12 that were the strongest drivers of engagement and they related directly to inclusiveness.

First, I found that if an employee can 'strongly agree' to the item, "My opinions count at work," 92% of those employees can be categorized as 'engaged.'

Second, I found that if an employee cannot 'strongly agree' (meaning respond with a 1-4 on a 5-point scale) to the item, "Someone at work cares about me as a person," only 12% of those employees can be categorized as 'engaged.'

In other words, in order for employees to be engaged, they need to feel like they matter and that their voice matters.

How do we create that? That is where inclusive leaders come in.

Inclusive Leadership

Inclusive leaders are those who:

1. Treat those they lead fairly
2. Value those they lead for who they are
3. Include those they lead in core decision making

They do not play favorites and they do not dictate from the top. Instead, they involve everyone and facilitate great ideas from the bottom up.

How do you become an inclusive leader?

Inclusive leaders operate with specific mindsets, which I call Success Mindsets.

First, inclusive leaders have a growth mindset. This means that they value growth and development over looking good. When a leader has a growth

mindset, they are able to see challenges and failure as opportunities to improve, grow, and make progress. As such, they are willing to let those they lead have responsibility and make decisions, even if it means that they will mess up every once in a while. Leaders with a fixed mindset are not able to be inclusive because they get so concerned about failing and not looking good that they limit those they lead from having responsibility and being involved in core decision making. They seek to control their employees.

Second, inclusive leaders have an open mindset. This means that they value seeking truth. As such, they are willing to believe that they can be wrong and to arrive at truth, they seek out the ideas and perspectives of others. Leaders with a closed mindset value being seen as being right. As such, they are not able to be inclusive because they limit the voice of others so that they can be seen as being “in charge.”

Third, inclusive leaders have an outward mindset. This means that they see and value others as who they truly are, people of value with unique and important needs, interests, and feelings. Leaders with an inward mindset see themselves as being more important than others, and as such, they see others as objects, losing sensitivity to their needs, interests, and feelings. To quote The Arbinger Institute, such leaders are not able to be inclusive because “they don’t know how much smarter smart people are, how much more skilled skilled people get, and how much harder hardworking people work when they see, and are seen, straightforwardly—as people.”

Conclusion

Not surprisingly, effective leadership is rooted in having the right mindsets. This is surely the case with inclusive leadership. The reality is that leaders do not go from being non-inclusive to being inclusive through a focus of changing their behaviors. To be inclusive, one has to have the right heart.

Thus the transition from less-inclusive to more-inclusive will only come through a change of heart, a change of mindsets. Thus, if you want to be a more inclusive leader or if you want your leaders to be more inclusive so that you and your organization can enjoy the benefits of enhanced engagement, commitment, and motivation, you have got to focus on developing your mindsets. As you do, naturally, inclusive leadership will arise.

If you would like to see if you have the mindsets necessary for effective inclusive leadership, take my free personal mindset assessment:

<https://ryangottfredson.com/personal-mindset-assessment>.

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