

The Essential Guide to Growing a Culture of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Healthcare Workplace



TOP PRIORITY: BUILDING HIGH-PERFORMANCE CULTURES OF INCLUSION

Fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) has topped the list of health industry issues since 2020, according to a global PwC report¹. An urgent focus is needed to upskill the healthcare workforce to build more inclusive work cultures and to provide equitable access to lifesaving care. Best-in-class healthcare organizations understand the need to make investments to achieve alignment with their mission and to assure they develop workforces that embrace inclusion and think like, look like, and understand the diverse patients they serve.

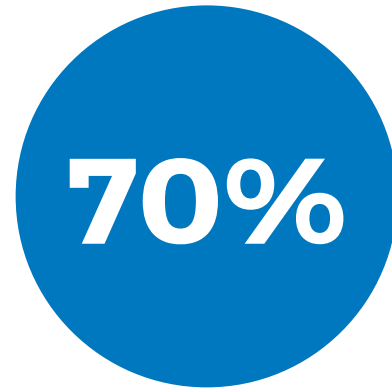
THE INCLUSION IMPERATIVE

Many healthcare companies are hard at work focused on building greater diversity in their recruiting and hiring practices, but diversity without inclusion will not yield the intended consequences. As the war on healthcare talent continues to heat up, diverse employees will choose to grow their careers at organizations that have a true sense of inclusion and belonging. Creating an inclusive employee experience is not only essential, it drives a sustainable competitive advantage over other organizations.

When there is an inclusion imperative, healthcare employees gain a greater sense of purpose and belonging. Add in cultural competence—which is interacting effectively with people of diverse backgrounds in a manner that signals respect—and you are on the journey to creating an ecosystem designed to serve everyone with equity and respect.

Culture influences not only healthcare practices but also how clinicians, insurers, and patients perceive illness. An important part of upskilling is helping employees become aware of their own attitudes and tendencies to stereotype people from different cultural groups or backgrounds. Bias is part of our human condition. To make progress, continuous learning opportunities must be injected into the modern flow of work.

Within the healthcare industry, that flow of work has its own unique challenges. Helping healthcare workers find time to engage with DEI learning in the small moments they're not at the bedside, in the lab or clinic requires building an intentional learning framework that prioritizes approachability, accessibility, and flexibility.



70 percent of job seekers actively seek out companies that are distinguished as diverse and inclusive workplaces when accepting job offers.





LESS TALK, MORE ACTION

In 2020, leaders published social media posts, wrote heartfelt letters, and spoke out about the importance of diversity and inclusion. Speaking up was a good step forward. It signaled to employees, patients, and stakeholders that your organization was committed to making positive changes. In 2021, leaders continued to develop DEI initiatives while tackling the heavy toll the global pandemic was having on their people, patients, and financial stability. In 2022, employees are now looking for true DEI change in the form of action. There is a lot to accomplish and a strong sense of urgency.

But building a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion is a journey, not a destination. And like all journeys, it starts with the first steps. Here's how to get moving:

1. Define Your "Why"

Be as specific as possible about why you are engaging in the DEI journey. Define your goal and ask yourself how it will drive your business imperatives. Simply doing it because everyone else is will guarantee a lack of engagement and sustainability. Are you looking to address systemic inequities in employee hiring, promotions, and development? Are you focused on the impact of bias on patient access and care? Do your goals and concerns crossover into both constituencies—employees and patients?

Whatever your reasoning, it should be relevant to your business model and you need to be able to articulate it clearly. Being intentional about why your organization is embarking on a DEI initiative is the critical first step to making progress and making change stick.

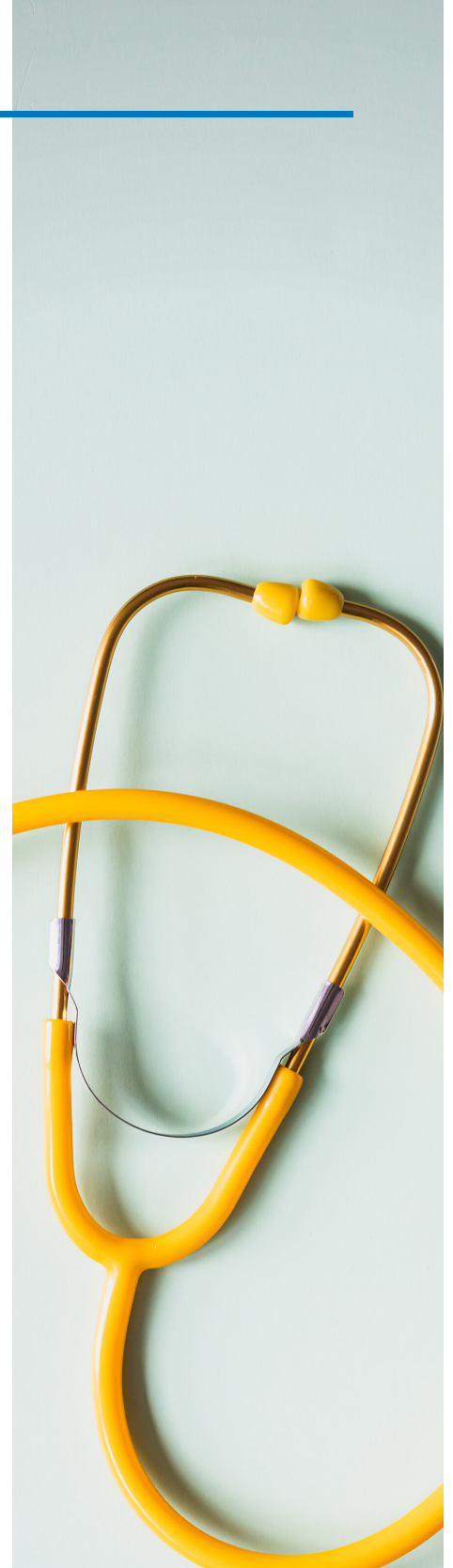
2. Engage Your Leaders

To be successful, your DEI initiatives need leadership support from top to bottom. At the top, you have an executive leadership without whom there is no budget, no enterprise-wide communication, and no long-term strategy support. To ignite top-level support for DEI, you should present a case that illustrates your company's "why" and makes the business case for diversity, equity, and inclusion that feels positive and inspirational for your senior leaders. Creating a future vision for what success will look like within the organization will help engage your C-Suite in the conversation.

For organizations that already have C-Suite buy-in for their DEI initiatives, there is still a large population that represents a critical player in its success: your people leaders.

Your managers and team leads are your main drivers of the day-to-day engagement and development of your workforce. They will be doing a good amount of communicating and conversation-starting around DEI topics with your people. So they absolutely need to be on board and equipped to play this pivotal role.

And just as important, your people leaders have a tremendous impact on your employee experience and are responsible for making many of the decisions that impact hiring, performance evaluations, promotions, and more. It's critical that they are able to do so in an equitable, unbiased fashion that prioritizes inclusion, trust, and belonging.



INCLUSION ACTION

Create Cultural Competence

Provide learning to help employees interact effectively with people and patients of diverse backgrounds in a manner that signals respect.


3. Embark on a Skills-Building Journey

Part of what may be holding you back is a concern that your people aren't equipped to examine and adjust their own beliefs, behaviors, and decisions, much less be a part of larger cultural change. We all have biases. Our brains have been programmed to make decisions *quickly*, and not necessarily *fairly*. But these biases—the ones that lead to unintentionally biased decision-making and the ones that can grow into full-fledged racist, anti-LGBTQ, anti-global views—can be de-programmed. Doing so takes a thoughtful, targeted approach to building the skills that identify and counteract our biases and expand our thinking.

Many healthcare organizations struggle to reach everyone in an inclusive way with ongoing learning that fits into their employees' flow of work. Add to that the current difficulty (if not complete moratorium) in pulling off in-person learning, and reaching all employees with learning content seems impossible.

But this is where DEI learning can shine.

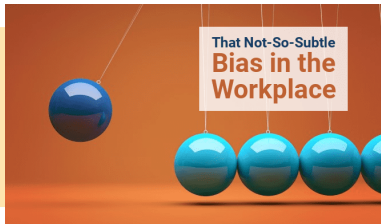
With DEI learning content, many of us often first avoid, then dismiss the learning before reaching a point of awareness, education, and action. By dripping out approachable, bite-sized content over time, you are working with their natural learning tendencies instead of against them.



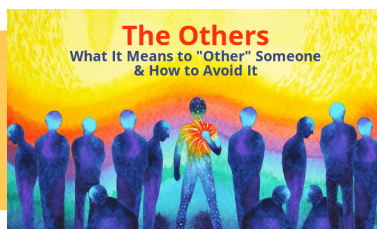
To get your employees to the point of action, it's important to deliver a skills-building learning journey around a wide range of DEI topics with content that feels **approachable, relatable, and digestible in a format that is **ongoing and builds over time**.**

What does this journey look like?

While each healthcare organization is different, it helps to start with introductory topics that are widely applicable and relevant. Beginning your learning journey with content around the many forms of unconscious bias helps bring people into the conversation in an approachable, non-punitive way.



Then introduce awareness information around the many types of people, cultures, backgrounds, ethnicities, genders, and lived experiences that exist in our world.



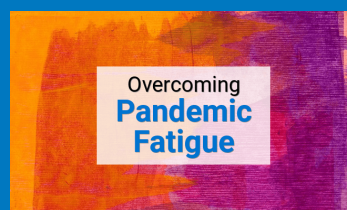
Follow that with learning around how your people can evaluate and modify their own actions, build empathy, and learn to take action on behalf of others as allies.



This journey should continue and evolve as your company progresses on the DEI journey, and the issues relevant to your organization and employees' lives change over time.

INCLUSION ACTION

Weave non-DEI content throughout the journey to support employee well-being, engage reluctant learners, and build trust.



4. Empower Difficult Conversations

For your DEI initiatives to really take root, your people need the opportunity to have open dialogue about racial, cultural, gender, and generational issues in your organization.

To help fuel these important but at times uncomfortable employee conversations, leverage topics that are relevant today to give people something to share and react to. Embed topics recently covered in your learning journey into meetings and schedule time for group discussion. You will have some who engage right away, and some who don't understand the importance. Help them get there by empowering them with the "why" you developed at the beginning of your initiative.

INCLUSION ACTION

Utilize Learning Nudges

Find ways to incorporate DEI conversations into daily huddles to remind your staff to prioritize inclusion and equity in their daily interactions with patients and families.

As we mentioned, your people leaders are critical to the success of your journey to diversity, equity, and inclusion, so be sure to equip them with not only the ongoing learning content but with material to help them spark and lead conversations with their people. Arm them with tactical discussion guides, conversation starters, and activities to inspire and inform their work with their teams.

This is again where the ideal methods for DEI skills building and the naturally busy flow of work for healthcare employees work well together. Have your leaders choose one topic, such as empathy, the "just like me" bias, or the value of neurodiverse teams, to discuss during meetings. Allow time for employee feedback and questions.

Follow up these conversations with bite-sized learning modules to help extend the learning and support the natural progression of education to awareness to action.

The path to DEI may seem daunting, but it is just that: a path. It helps to build achievable milestones along the way, but the most important indicator of success is the dedication to stay on it.

The power and purpose of DEI in healthcare.

Blue Ocean Brain has been helping companies build and succeed on the journey to DEI for seven years. Our healthcare clients—from large hospital systems to specialized medical facilities to pharmaceutical companies—trust that we understand the specific challenges facing healthcare workers today. The Blue Ocean Brain model of learning is perfectly suited to help healthcare organizations deliver impactful learning around the topics most important to you and your people, from diversity and inclusion, to resilience, to mental health and well-being, and more.

"Blue Ocean Brain played a significant role in helping us gain traction as it pertains to diversity and inclusion education. Being in such a fast-paced industry, in the midst of a pandemic, their microlearning offered our team members a way to engage and immediately have tools in which to deploy both personally and professionally."

**Armond Kinsey,
Vice President and
Chief Diversity Officer
Atlantic Health System**



"Gratefully, the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion are not new to our organization. Our healing mission calls us to improve the health of the people and communities we serve, especially those who are most vulnerable. Core to that mission is meeting the unique needs of our community members and providing inclusive and equitable healthcare for all. We know that our work in support of diversity, equity, and inclusion is a long-term journey and believe it is a commitment we must all share. We are grateful to be joined on that journey by the Blue Ocean Brain team. Our partnership proves that our whole is far greater than just the sum of our parts. We are stronger, together!"

**Andrew Lawrence,
System Vice President,
Enterprise Learning &
Personal Development
SCL Health**

How can we help you support your people?

From diversity, equity, and inclusion, to resilience and well-being, to leadership and communication, Blue Ocean Brain has modern, expert-developed learning content to support the growth and mental health of your specialized workforce of dedicated healthcare professionals.

To learn more about Blue Ocean Brain or to schedule a personalized consultation, visit blueoceanbrain.com.

Grounded in the latest neuroscience, Blue Ocean Brain is a pioneering microlearning firm that combines collaborative consultation, award-winning content, and a scalable design solution to help clients of all sizes and industries develop a high-performing, inclusive culture of continuous learning.

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