

How To: Be More Inclusive in Staff Supervision

Resource Type: Articles

Topic: HR Risk and Employment Practices

Managing other employees is one of the most important roles a leader can have. Inclusive supervision should be a top priority for nonprofit leaders who manage others. But most leaders have never been taught to do that. Here are some practices that will help. As you'll see, your team members' feedback will paint a picture of where you need to learn, grow, and change to become a more inclusive manager. And an inclusive team will be more innovative, responsive, and thoughtful in how it executes its mission.

Buy in. If you're privately telling peers that your organization's goals for hiring and retaining diverse staff are pie in the sky, you're not fully on board to execute them. What aspects of your organization's diversity strategy resonate with your values? Focus on those, commit to doing the work, and bring your best effort to meet the challenges. Where are your weak spots in diversity and inclusion? Do the reading, talking, and action to grow in areas that challenge you. Don't make others educate you, but when people are open to interaction and dialogue, welcome it.

Solicit meaningful feedback. Ask your team members what type of supervision works best for them, such as what kind of positive and constructive feedback they prefer. Request their feedback on how your supervision approach works for them. These conversations may feel awkward at first. However, communicate that you want to create the best working environment for everyone, and these discussions can help, even if they're uncomfortable. When a team member gives you constructive feedback, thank them, tell them how you will address the issue they raised, and set aside time to reflect on what you've heard and the changes you'll make in response.

Honor differences and own your mistakes

Equitable is not equal. Different people may respond best to different supervisory approaches. Inclusive staff supervision makes room for that. While it's vital to treat staff fairly and equitably, you don't have to work with each member of your team in the exact same way.

Take an interest in your employees as people. Ask your team members questions about what fulfills them, their likes and dislikes. Show your interest in them and let them set the standard for how much they want to share about their personal lives. Giving people the experience of feeling seen is a form of inclusion, and it will make team members more likely to share other issues and concerns with you.

Apologize. When you're wrong, say so, without equivocation. If your error caused harm, tell the person or people who witnessed it that you're sorry. Demonstrating that you can acknowledge and address mistakes helps create a climate in which people speak up about offensive comments or actions.

Model inclusive behavior for your team

Help your team members work across differences. Provide space, time, and feedback to help your employees grow their own abilities to navigate issues around diversity, equity, and inclusion. Provide time and resources for courses, seminars, and other learning. Have regular discussions with employees about the opportunities and challenges they face working with people who are different from them. Help team members

brainstorm ways to navigate those opportunities and challenges—and to learn.

Set and enforce standards of respect. Communicate that offensive, inappropriate, or biased behaviors at work are not OK. Provide employees a safe way to report such incidents and adopt a straightforward approach to investigating and responding to reports.

Promote connection. Provide opportunities for employees to get to know one another as people and develop relationships across the organization. Virtual or in-person gatherings can present great opportunities to connect. Hold those events during the workday so you don't place an undue burden on employees with responsibilities outside of work.

Be flexible. Work to say yes to as many requests for flexible schedules, shift changes, etc. as you can. Recognizing that people do their best work at different times and via different methods can make team members feel valued and seen for the strengths and skills they bring.

Avoid 'faux flexibility.' True flexibility exists when staff have autonomy and choice. 'Faux flexibility' is when you offer limited options and require employees to choose one of your options.

Pause before you speak. A pause of a few seconds in a new situation can help our higher-level brain kick in and bypass some of the unconscious biases we all hold. You're human and you will make mistakes (and need to apologize, above), but a brief pause can prevent quite a few careless comments that could damage trust.

Resources:

- [“Developing Inclusive Communities Begins with Inclusive Supervision” – ACUI](#)
- [Inclusive Workplaces Focus on Management Practices That Matter, Not Fluff – McKinsey](#)
- [Inclusive Leadership: Tips for Leaders Looking to Grow – Qualtrics](#)