



EMBEDDING DEI INTO DAILY LEADERSHIP ACTIONS THROUGH CURIOSITY, COURAGE AND CONNECTION



Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts are not new, yet in many organizations they are still seen as an ‘add-on’ – something you do to your organization or your employees, and after you’ve taken care of business priorities. DEI is a business priority, and one that cannot be pushed down the agenda in difficult economic times.

For one, DEI is a key driver of business outcomes, something supporters of the DEI ‘business case’ are quick to point out. However, DEI is a business priority not just because it’s good for business, but because organizations are part of society. Unless they recognize the unique barriers some groups in that society face, work to remove those obstacles and provide access and opportunity to all, they are going to perpetuate existing inequities and be left behind.

DEI needs to be embedded into organizational culture so it doesn’t fall off the radar when budgets get cut or interest in the DEI agenda wanes. This means that organizations, leaders and employees change how they do things on a daily basis and DEI becomes intentional and expected.

Leaders at all levels play a critical role in both championing and advancing DEI efforts within an organization. Stakeholders such as employees, customers, suppliers and even social media followers increasingly have a voice alongside investors or shareholders. Leaders who attempt to maintain a neutral or apolitical stance are seen as out of touch and even ineffective, while leaders with a strong focus on responding to social change are needed more than ever.

All of this calls for leaders to demonstrate inclusive behaviors on a daily basis and lead the way in making DEI part of the organizational culture. To do this, leaders need to tap into the 3 Cs of inclusive leadership:

CURIOSITY

Create the conditions for learning and creative thinking. This is about leading with a sense of openness to ideas, perspectives, approaches, and empowering others to do the same.

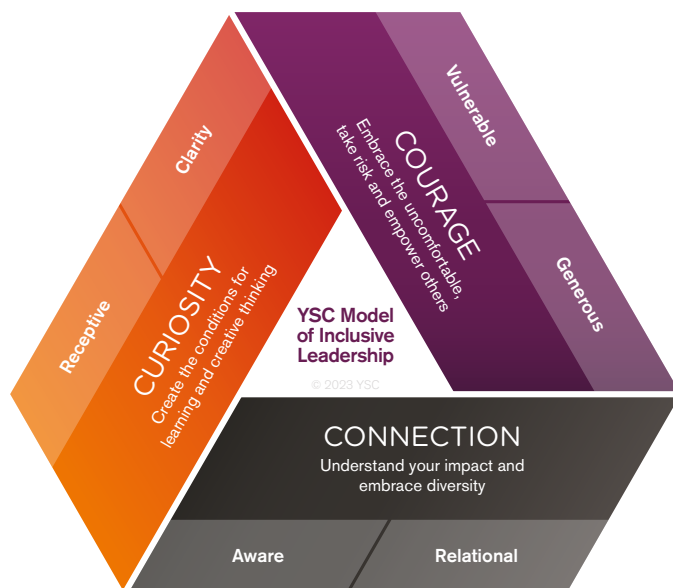
COURAGE

Embrace the uncomfortable, take risk and make space for others. This is about taking risks to challenge aspects of oneself, others, and systems that intentionally or unintentionally create exclusion, and then having the resilience to manage through the discomfort that follows.

CONNECTION

Acknowledge one’s positionality and impact, and take actions to embrace diversity. This is about bridging across boundaries of difference and creating the social, emotional and structural ties that hold those bridges in place. It is about ensuring people can experience themselves as unique and yet still feel part of a whole, and then mobilizing that whole toward a common goal.

These 3 Cs – Curiosity, Courage and Connection – are relevant no matter what your business is or what kind or level of leader you are. To make DEI a core and embedded part of your everyday leadership, we have the following ideas for how you can be more inclusive across various employee touchpoints.



> ATTRACTING TALENT

Sourcing, recruiting, hiring (interviewing, selection tools), onboarding

Curiosity

Actively seek referrals from different people, teams, functions etc., especially from marginalized group members.

Question whether current job requirements (e.g. degree, location, management responsibilities) are based on your own profile or on the current (less diverse) team – challenge these with a keen focus on what’s truly ‘job related’.

Courage

Question your (and others’) first impressions.

‘Take a bet’ on a candidate that has a different career history than your usual hires.

Connection

Surface to your fellow interviewers/HR team potential ‘similarity bias’ i.e. how all of your own social identities and cultural context might influence likes/preferences and comfort with candidates similar to you.

Create a sense of inclusion from the start (e.g. with fair interview processes and panel composition).

> PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Goal setting, performance ratings, evaluation conversations

Curiosity

Explore new ideas and spend time understanding conflicting views rather than just responding with what you think is right.

Provide various channels, including anonymous ones, to dispute performance evaluations.

Courage

Reward inclusive behaviors in the team.

Check the language you use to provide feedback and ask yourself if you'd use that language for people from other identity groups.

Connection

Provide others (especially those overlooked so far) with opportunities to shadow you or receive coaching.

Play back your own assumptions and evaluations with others. Ask for their perspective to build a shared understanding.

> DAILY INTERACTIONS

1-1s, team meetings, client and customer interactions, socializing

Curiosity

Role model giving those from marginalised groups more of a voice to show up as a true ally.

When voting or sharing views, go last to avoid influencing others.

Courage

Speak out when you see inequity in action. Interrupt microaggressions.

'Make space' for others who might have been overlooked so far – give them development opportunities, take risks on them and give up something so that they benefit.

Connection

Create opportunities for yourself and your team to connect with those they wouldn't usually.

Find a creative opening or do a short check-in at the start of meetings and/or 1-1s to get to know your team a little better and make personal connections.

> DEVELOPMENT AND ADVANCEMENT

Promotion discussions, sponsorship & mentoring, talent reviews

Curiosity

Reframe how you ask questions by moving from reactive questions to learning- oriented, exploratory questions.

Don't make assumptions about your teams' career goals; be curious about their motivators, drivers and blockers.

Courage

Support or advocate for an employee from a minoritized group, who can grow into a role with a little support even if they don't have the 'usual' expected experience for it.

Call out high potential talent that has been overlooked for promotion or development opportunities.

Connection

Ask your peers who's receiving opportunities for development or sponsorship, and convert your mentoring and informal coaching relationships to sponsorships.

Build wider connections to avoid giving sponsorship and mentoring opportunities to only those in your immediate network.

> EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Surveys, exit interviews, retention conversations

Curiosity

Ask others whether they feel included, respected and valued. If not, what could the leader do differently?

Ask yourself what aspects of someone's experience may differ from your own, or from that of the 'dominant' group, and why?

Courage

Say "I don't know", "I need support" or "I am sorry" to or in front of your team to show yourself as vulnerable and open to learning from everyone.

Approach the folks in your team with whom you've avoided tough conversations (e.g. those who feel angry or disengaged).

Connection

Reach out to find out what drives others' engagement at work, and what is a blocker to being engaged.

Have 'listening conversations' with employees about employee survey results, and what their reactions/tips are for you.

IN SUMMARY

These suggestions are not exhaustive; there are many other ways leaders can be inclusive. But these ideas show that the way leaders interact with their employees and other colleagues impacts inclusion and in turn help to make organizations more diverse, equitable and inclusive. Effective leadership demands – and drives – DEI. Embracing this principle requires inclusive leadership to become engrained in leaders' daily actions through curiosity, courage and connection.

LEARN MORE

Email info@ysc.com to find out how we can support your leadership strategy.

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