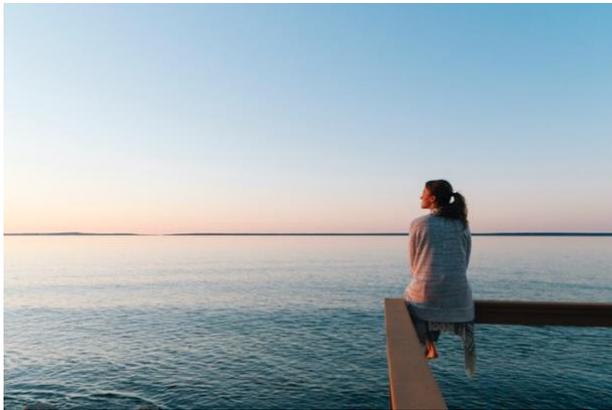




Learning from 2020: How to Welcome, Celebrate and Protect DEI in Your Organization

For years, I asked clients, “Imagine the year is 2020 and you’ve reached your goal. What is happening? What are you doing? Where are you going? How are you feeling?”

The Paradoxes of 2020: Darkness and Light, Tragedy and Triumph



Well, 2020, the year that sounded so perfect, did not turn out exactly as we hoped or predicted. There has been darkness and light, tragedy and triumph. It has been a year of managing contradictions. It has on one hand been unexpected, shocking, rattling and frightening; while at the same time eye opening, innovative, courageous, settling, curious and reflective. We are learning every day while carrying a lot.

We are six months into a pandemic that has killed nearly 200,000 Americans. We’ve watched protests for Black lives and, in some cases, confronted our own or other’s white privilege. Fires rage throughout California along with rolling blackouts. The campaigns

for the 2020 elections move toward their conclusions. All the while, we work remotely (if we are working) and juggle child care, education and loneliness. We are doing our best.

On the bright side, we’ve mastered the art of looking polished from the waist up as we rock our Zoom meetings. We’ve learned about online schooling and creative ways to visit one another, exercise and use some newly found free time.

What We Can Control

As I’ve reflected on the past months, I’ve made an effort to discover what I actually have some control over. I can vote, I can wear a mask and use hand sanitizer, and I can go on a “news diet” and take a break from the news when I start feeling stressed. These actions will all help manage life in the short term. As I thought deeply about the protests and what that means for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), I wondered how I could incorporate a new way of thinking and behaving to help expand and improve the world for myself, my clients and society for the long term. My conversations with clients boosted my yearning for us to make a difference.

Reflections from Leaders about Bias

I am frequently awed by my clients’ abilities to reflect and ponder how they can be the change they want to see. Clients asked me the following questions over the last several months:

- Do I have unconscious bias I’m not aware of? How would I know and how does it affect my leadership?
- How can I ensure my company is operating with values and not with unconscious biases?
- What can I do to make a difference?
- How can I be anti-racist?
- How do we incorporate DEI into culture and values?

These were all great questions. Before I could create meaningful learning and development opportunities for my clients, I needed to have my own reflections on systemic racism, the lens of protestors, the history of our country and unconscious bias. I add this question: How can we examine whole systems, determine where change is needed, and then implement the changes to reduce and eliminate bias and promote justice?



The Protestors' View: Realization, Action and Voice

The horrifying event of George Floyd's killing in broad daylight on May 25 was an impetus for the world to scream out, "NO MORE!" Citizens across all 50 states protested in a way not seen since Martin Luther King's assassination in 1968, followed by people around the world. The protestors' expressions of rage, compassion and fight for change spoke for many of us. There were moments that felt as if we had not progressed as a society in the treatment of Black lives as well as all those who represent the diversity of this country. [King's words](#) in this letter sent from jail in 1963 were so applicable in 2020, specifically when he said, "Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community

which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored."

Looking at the unfortunate event from the lens of power distance, the ability to speak one's voice and company culture, I wondered, What if just one of the three officers present with Derek Chauvin had the courage to tell him to release his hold on Floyd? What if their department had helped them develop awareness of unconscious bias and to speak up for one's values and another's safety? What might have been different?

As citizens realized that our country was partly built on slavery and discrimination, they started pulling down statues of leaders, one by one. Love, hate, voice, destruction, deconstruction. Amid all this, Representative [John Lewis](#) (may he rest in peace) watched as cities continued the battle he had begun with King in 1963. How he must have been saddened that we still fight for African American's rights and lives – and how he must have been proud to see everyone sharing their voices. It was part of his legacy that brought us here.

In many cities, following the protests and destruction that often comes with protests, the community came together to clean up and show love and care for one's neighbors.

As we examine this issue from a systems perspective, there are many deep questions we need to ask:

- How can mental health professionals and social workers assist law enforcement officers with the many issues that require deeper, support, training and knowledge than these officers are equipped to handle?
- How can law enforcement officers receive training so they notice and reframe their biases when in dangerous situations?
- How can citizens learn to better manage and protect themselves if such biases exist?
- Should a police officer's race and culture play a role where she/he/they is assigned? For example, might citizens benefit from having police officers who represent their identities patrol their areas?
- How can we ensure there is justice toward police officers who neglect, hurt and kill those they are meant to serve? How can the biases of attorneys general, judges and juries be managed?

Going Through the Process of Learning

I spent time learning about cultures that promote discrimination and methods for driving change. I thought about the challenge of how we can at one time condemn police brutality, support Black lives and support good police officers. I read, researched and learned about our history of discrimination and about unconscious and conscious bias. I listened to my students and my clients. I had lengthy conversations with my colleagues about the power of healing and reparations for communities that have faced pain and discrimination. I pondered my own experiences as a first-generation American growing up in the United States and how I hid my identity to avoid harassment. I explored the depths of America's

foundation, the fight for rights among African Americans, women and immigrants; and how in the face of all of this, we could be change agents.

I learned how organizations can be more diverse and inclusive in today's environment, how they can identify biases that we all have, and how they can apply this learning to creating a diverse and inclusive workplace.

I've turned my research, reflection and findings into a three-part workshop series entitled, "Welcoming, Celebrating and Protecting DEI in Your Organization." (*Details and takeaways can be found at the conclusion of this article*).

My Next Steps as I Work with Leaders

Following are ways I plan on taking a stand and sharing my voice for DEI.



1. Speaking up for Identity. Reclaiming my real name and identity that I chose to forgo to protect myself from racism as a child. I am Shahrzad Sherry Nooravi. I will share this in an upcoming article.

2. Empowering others to Share their Voice. Working with my clients to review how they are taking a stand and empowering them to be the voice among the many well-intended people who are afraid and do not know where to start. A client of mine boldly asked her CEO, "How will we review our mental models and all the ways we contribute to systemic racism?" Her taking this stand opened up the doors for the rest of the executive team to begin the conversation.

3. Making the time to Process. Encouraging and holding Talking Circles.

4. Redefining "Executive Presence." Helping clients view the term coined by Sylvia Hewlett in a way that acknowledges and appreciates diversity, authenticity and even quirkiness versus a one-dimensional view of a leader.

5. Discovering DEI as a Major Part of Company Culture. Explaining DEI and how it can be applied to companies and anyone who is curious.

6. Lifelong Learning and Expanding Horizons. In my effort to learn more about other's cultures, religions, experiences, etc., I plan on visiting my neighbor's church and my friend's mosque. I will continue to have learning conversations with my colleagues. I recently learned that 2020 marks the 51st anniversary of the Stonewall riots, in which members of New York's LGBT community fought back against police treatment following a raid on the Stonewall Inn, a popular gay bar. These protests were a critical event in the gay liberation movement and the modern fight for LGBTQ rights. Another example is I learned more about the laws that Ruth Bader Ginsburg (may she rest in peace) helped create, as an attorney and Supreme Court justice. These included equal protection under the law for women and no discrimination on the basis of sex.

Your Five Potential Next Steps:



1. Learn about history. This amazing overview covers it all:

<http://www.400yearsofinequality.org/400-years-timeline.html>

John Lewis: <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/tag/john-lewis/Black-History-Milestones>

If you enjoy learning through film, here are some amazing ones:

“[Enslaved](#),” Samuel L. Jackson’s new docuseries; “The Color Purple,” “Green Book,” “Hidden Figures,” “Harriet,” “Loving,” “12 Years a Slave,” “Selma,” “Malcolm X,” “Just Mercy,” “Glory,” “Straight Outta Compton,” “42,” “BlacKkKlansman”

2. Take a Stand.

If you see someone being mistreated, speak up. Whether it is a colleague, customer or employee harassing someone for their gender, color, culture, sexual preference, or anything in the wheel of diversity, speak up and tell the harasser it’s not OK. Another way to speak up is to take a stand when you observe symptoms of systemic racism. For example, if your PTA board consists of 95% white parents and your student body contains only 50% white students, notice that the other 50% of

students and their families are not being represented and encourage these parents to join and get involved. Other examples are to question the school administrators’ assumptions that all students have internet access to do their homework assignments, or that all job applicants have access to specific software and tools. Historical inequities can make what

are seemingly ‘economic’ disparities actually racist.

3. Support Organizations that Do the Right Thing

You can learn what organizations are doing or not doing by Googling the company’s name and statement regarding Black Lives Matter. Below are not just statements from some organizations, but actions they will take:

[Netflix](#) | [Bank of America](#) | [Target](#) | [TJ Maxx](#) | [Etsy](#) | [Candle Science](#) | [Yelp](#)

4. Encourage your Organization to Review its Practices

- Bring in experts who will partner with human resources departments to educate, review and revise your policies.
- Ask who should be at the table. Often, there will be leadership meetings that could use the views of managers, individual contributors or informal leaders. Give them a chance to share their voices on what can be better.
- Encourage diversity and inclusion with [Employee Resource Groups \(ERG\)](#).
- Support employees in giving back to nonprofits that support diversity.

[Why Inclusive Leaders are Good for Organizations, and How to Become One](#)

[SHRM: Six Steps for Building an Inclusive Workplace](#)

[Forbes: How to Create a More Inclusive Workplace Culture](#)

5. **Be the One Who Goes First.** Speak up first, take a stand first and take a risk first: Here’s a [memorable 3-minute video about making the first move and creating a movement](#).

Here’s to your ongoing curiosity and lifelong learning. Learning history, noticing our own and others’ biases and then taking a stand to make a difference is a lifelong journey that will benefit us all. I will continue this work and encourage us as a society to do the same.

Remember Rep. Lewis’ words: “Nothing can stop the power of a committed and determined people to make a difference in our society.”

Workshop Series:

Welcoming, Celebrating and Protecting DEI in your Organization



Our country has experienced protests through this year and, as a result, we are evolving as a nation as we discover and explore our history, biases and voices. This session offers an opportunity to separate fact from fiction, talk about these issues in a non-political way and to take a deep dive on how to incorporate DEI as a way of leading and operating in the world.

“Diversity is being invited to the party.
Inclusion is being asked to dance.”

This talk is for you if:

- You want to explore terms like *anti-racist*, *white privilege*, *Black Lives Matter*, *white fragility*, *reparations* and *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)*.
- You want to become aware of your biases and make sure that you are hiring, coaching and promoting team members in a way that protects DEI.
- You want to create an amazingly diverse and inclusive workplace where there is space to hear from all your team members.
- You want to create a culture shift: a way of being, not a way of doing.
- You want to discover how to share your voice and speak up for inclusion, respect and open communication – even though it’s hard!

Key takeaways will include:

1. How to observe, identify and reframe common unconscious biases that affect decision making when recruiting, coaching, rewarding and promoting employees
2. Steps to identify your company culture’s strengths and development needs through the lens of DEI, including seeking input throughout the organization
3. Tips for identifying one’s own personal values
4. How to speak up when your personal or company values have been violated; how to respond to talented leaders who are not so nice
5. Ways to “see” all of the diversity in your organization and make DEI a part of how you operate

An Overview of DEI

Diversity: Includes race, color, ethnicity, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status, veteran status, education, marital status, language, age, gender, gender expression, gender identity, sexual orientation, mental or physical ability, genetic information and learning styles.

Equity: The guarantee of **fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all** while striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented some groups from fully participating. The principle of equity acknowledges that there are historically underserved and underrepresented populations, and that fairness regarding these unbalanced conditions is needed to assist equality in providing all groups effective opportunities.

Inclusion: Authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities and decision/policy making in a way that **shares power and ensures equal access** to opportunities and resources.

Diversity advocate Verna Myers said, “**Diversity is being invited to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance.**”

