



Supervisor NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
February 2025

Seven Strategies For Inclusive Leadership

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Cultivating a sense of belonging is essential for boosting employee retention and performance. Inclusive leadership fosters trust, connection, and respect, empowering employees to thrive. While empathy, flexibility, and personalized recognition strengthen workplace loyalty and engagement.

An inclusive leader is one who ensures every team member feels valued, heard, and respected. Inclusive leaders, by definition, work to ensure all team members are included and connected to the larger team. By implementing inclusive leadership practices, leaders will create a stronger sense of belonging and community.

Inclusive Leadership Strategies

1. Create a Safe Place for Open Dialogue

When leading a team, managers should strive to create an environment where everyone feels comfortable sharing ideas, voicing concerns, and being authentic without fear of retribution, retaliation for having a differing opinion, or judgement. Promote safety by modeling vulnerability and openness. For instance, start team meetings by sharing a personal challenge or mistake and how you've learned from it. Then invite others to share their ideas or concerns, assuring them there's no wrong answer. An inclusive manager might say, "I'm trying out a new process and I'd love your honest feedback – it's okay to point out areas for improvement." When employees see that leaders are open to critique, they'll feel safer contributing their own ideas.

2. Encourage Diverse Perspectives

We've all been in a team meeting where one or two voices dominate the discussion. An inclusive leader can proactively address this by rotating facilitation roles or using structured methods like a "round-robin" to ensure everyone has a turn to speak. For instance, try saying "Let's go around the table – I'd like to hear everyone's thoughts on this proposal before we move forward." Highlighting and implementing ideas from quieter team members reinforces their value and shows the team that every perspective matters.

3. Become a Strength-Based Leader

Leaders operating from a deficit mindset will view employee differences and "bad." In contrast, a strength-based leader views differences as unique and looks for opportunities to leverage these in ways that promote the strengths of the team. For example, if an employee consistently misses deadlines but excels in creative brainstorming, reassign their role to focus on ideation while pairing them with a detail-oriented team member for execution. Recognize the complementary strengths publicly: "Damian's creativity and Sara's organizational skills made this project a success!" This approach fosters mutual respect and belonging by emphasizing collaboration over competition.

4. Demonstrate Empathy and Cultural Sensitivity

Imagine onboarding a new team member who comes from a different cultural background. An empathetic leader might ask open-ended questions like, "What can we do to help you feel supported in this transition?" Celebrate cultural diversity by recognizing holidays or traditions that matter to team members.

5. Support Work-Life Balance and Flexibility

Offering flexibility and family-friendly workplace environments is more important than ever before. Consider an employee who needs to adjust their hours

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to care for a sick relative. Instead of a rigid schedule, an inclusive leader might offer flexible options, like shifting start times or allowing remote work. During a performance review, the leader might say, "I want you to prioritize your family while continuing to contribute to the team – let's discuss how we can make that work." This demonstrates that you see employees as a whole person, not just workers, which builds loyalty and belonging.

6. Consistent Recognition & Acknowledgement

Recognition doesn't have to wait for big accomplishments. For example, an inclusive leader might say during a team meeting, "I want to shout out Teresa for stepping up and resolving that client issue last week – it made a huge difference." Use personalized methods, like a handwritten note or a quick one-on-one, to show appreciation. You could say, "I noticed how you helped John onboard this week. That collaboration is exactly what makes our team great!"

7. Humanize the Workplace

Let employees know that you see and value them as real humans, and not just as cogs in a big business machine. For example, take 10 minutes in a team meeting to ask everyone to share something they're excited about outside of work. An inclusive leader might also remember personal details – "How was your daughter's recital last weekend" – to show genuine care. When employees feel valued, they report higher levels of satisfaction, motivation, and engagement. Importantly, employees who feel respected are more loyal to their company.

The Importance of Inclusive Leadership

Cultivating a culture of belonging isn't just a leadership trend – it's a critical strategy for building stronger, more resilient teams. By creating an environment where employees feel valued, respected, and truly part of the team, leaders unlock their workforce's full potential. Inclusive leadership isn't about grand gestures; it's about consistent, intentional practices that prioritize connection, celebrate diversity, and recognize the whole person. When leaders embrace these seven strategies, they foster a workplace dynamic where employees feel supported and inspired, fueling both

individual and organizational success. In a world where talent retention is more competitive than ever, investing in belonging isn't optional – it's the future of leadership.

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References:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/leading-with-connection/202412/creating-a-culture-of-belonging-inclusive-leadership>