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Exclusive Conversation with

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& Independent Director on
Corporate Board

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DRIVING DIVERSITY – WOMEN AT THE HELM

Showcasing women's ascendancy to the
driver's seat in supply chain

Inclusivity is the key to maintaining Workplace Diversity

“The changing workforce demographics expect its leaders to be socially and environmentally responsible, to better understand Talent Management, and to create places where diverse contributions are maximized for the enterprise’s strategic benefit. In short, a commitment to full inclusivity is now a leadership and business competency. Deficiencies here will limit a leader’s effectiveness and advancement in much the same way as a lack of financial acumen,” highlights **Aparna Sharma, HR Practitioner & Independent Director on Corporate Board.**

What are the challenges that women face at the Workplace? What are the strategies that can help them address and work on the challenges?

Even well into the 21st Century, women continue to face unique challenges at the workplace. Long-standing issues like the wage gap, the glass ceiling, and hostile work environments persist and new challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have disproportionately affected women. Some of the persistent challenges such as Societal mindset; Gender Stereotypes; Pay Disparity; Imposter syndrome; Lack of Equal Opportunities; Difficult to overcome Career gap/ Rejoining the workforce; Bias in Hiring decisions; and Lack of sensitivity are constantly challenging women to prove their mettle time and again and sometimes even dissuade them from charting their professional journey.

While such eventualities will persist, there are ways, which can help them

reach their goalpost. First & foremost, they must be confident about their capabilities. Women should find a Mentor who can guide them to take on the desired career path. They must be able to advocate for themselves. Women should build a support system on whom they can bank upon and shouldn’t hesitate to ask for help. Most importantly, women must be proactive and celebrate their successes. Ultimately, the challenges that women face at the workplace are not just women’s issues, they are everyone’s issues.

Even if you are not directly impacted, you can still have an important role to play in recognizing and overcoming gender bias at work. One of the most important things you can do is to educate yourself on the issues and understand the experiences of women around you. Listen to their stories and be willing to learn from them. You can also start by examining your own biases and assumptions, and actively work to



address them.

If you are a manager or an employer, you can take steps to address these issues by conducting regular pay equity audits, establishing a clear career path for employees, and providing opportunities for training and mentoring. You can also create a safe reporting system for employees to report any incidents of harassment or discrimination.

If you are a coworker or colleague, you can be an ally to women by speaking up when you witness discriminatory behaviour and creating a supportive and inclusive work environment. This can include actively listening to women's experiences and perspectives, offering to help with projects or assignments, and advocating for policies and practices that promote gender equality in the workplace.

It's important to remember that change takes time & efforts and addressing these challenges is an ongoing process that requires commitment and dedication from everyone. We may not see immediate results, but every small step we take towards gender equality is a step in the right direction.

How can HR professionals aim to strike the right equilibrium when it comes to diversity & inclusion?

Promoting and improving diversity and inclusion at the workplace is a crucial initiative that many companies are now taking. A diverse workforce, in terms of age, race, religion, nationality, sexual orientations, gender, gender identity, brings diverse viewpoints and perspectives to the company. Diversity at the workplace does not necessarily mean inclusivity at the workplace. Making Diversity a priority is important; so is

Creating a Culture where people from all backgrounds feel Included. Inclusivity is the key to maintaining (not just creating) Workplace Diversity.

What are the best practices that companies can implement to offer a safe & sound working culture for women?

▲▼ Know the Diversity Goals and Vision of your organization and its connection to the overall business objectives. Commit to the process by understanding how diversity impacts your role, and how your role impacts the success of the diversity initiative.

▲▼ Participate in Employee Engagement Surveys and respond as openly and honestly as possible. Finding an Internal Champion with whom you can comfortably express concerns and/or elicit advice can be instrumental in supporting your efforts.

▲▼ Actively engage in the Diversity effort. You can take part in or start an Employee Resource Group (ERG), or volunteer to chair or serve on committees that organize diversity-related events and activities. Consider becoming a mentor, mentee, or part of a co-mentoring relationship. These activities require commitment of time but represent a valuable opportunity for personal and professional development.

▲▼ Become Culturally Competent. Take the time to learn about different cultures, races, religions and backgrounds represented by your colleagues. Ask your co-workers

to share some of the customs and practices associated with their cultures. Become familiar with diversity-related terms and, if you err, apologize and ask for help.

▲▼ Treat people in a way they wish to be treated rather than the way you wish to be treated. Common social activities and practices that are comfortable for you may not be comfortable for everyone. Most importantly, be Respectful always. Diversity exists everywhere — not just in the office. Take these diversity principles into your community and your home.

▲▼ Drive Positive change in the organization. Be a Spokesperson for diversity issues that are not necessarily your own. Any organization will find it difficult to ignore the powerful voice created when groups representing different diversity dimensions unite.

▲▼ Welcome Ideas that are different from your own and support fellow teammates. The creativity that comes with diversity can help you generate new ideas or improve a process already in place. It can also make work more interesting, engaging, and fun.

▲▼ Understand the diversity elements you personally bring to the organization. Diversity comes not only in the form of Culture, Race, and Gender but also includes elements such as Socio-Economic background, Education level, Geographic location, Sexual Orientation, Thought process,

Diversity work is a journey, not a destination. It takes time, patience, and perseverance. Be tolerant of co-workers who do not yet appreciate the value of diversity or who may not always behave respectfully. Often, negative behaviour comes from ignorance rather than malice. A willingness to educate can go a long way.

and many others. Each of us brings to the table a lifetime of experiences and knowledge. Each of us is different and adds value to the organization because of these differences.

- ▲▼ **Commit to Continuous Improvement.** Be willing to learn, accept feedback, and listen to the concerns of those around you. Even the most enlightened individual can find opportunities for growth.
- ▲▼ **Communicate and educate.** Diversity work is a journey, not a destination. It takes time, patience, and perseverance. Be tolerant of co-workers who do not yet appreciate the value of diversity or who may not always behave respectfully. Often, negative behaviour comes from ignorance rather than malice. A willingness to educate can go a long way.

How can diversity impact success at the workplace?

Here are 5 advantages that a diversified workforce can bring to your company...

Greater Creativity and Innovation: Whenever a group of like-minded people are put together, they will generate similar ideas. This is because their thinking patterns are very much alike. However, if you change things up by mixing diverse individuals together,

you'll have a workforce that's more prone to Creativity and Innovation — two important ingredients for success. A heterogeneous workforce will be able to exchange unique perspectives and spark fresh ideas.

Increased Productivity: Diversity and Productivity go hand in hand. Research has found that diversifying your team can boost productivity by 35%. A diverse workforce is more likely to understand your customers' needs and come up with ideas to fulfil them. Diversity at the workplace will also increase employee morale and instil a desire to be more effective and work more efficiently. This will greatly increase the productivity of your business.

Reduced Employee Turnover: A workplace that encourages diversity and inclusion will make employees feel valued and accepted. This will ensure happiness among your workforces. Happy workers will stay with your company for longer, meaning you'll spend less money and time on recruiting. By reducing your employee turnover, you'll have more time and funds to invest elsewhere in your business.

Connect to a Wider Range of Consumers: If you want to target a wide range of consumers, you'll need a diverse workforce. By hiring individuals of varying backgrounds, languages,

etc., you can ensure that your company appeals to a wider target market. Because your employees come from different backgrounds, they'll be able to connect with consumers from all walks of life.

Increased Revenue: Increasing revenue is a priority in any company. By reaping all the benefits of a diverse workforce, you will come closer to your goal of increasing profits. A recent study by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) found that companies with a diverse workforce and increased innovation generated 19% more revenue than companies with lower diversity scores. The proof is in the numbers.

In one of your posts, you have emphasized, "Diversity and Inclusion is a fundamental Business Competency". Can you elaborate on this pls?

The changing workforce demographics expects its leaders to be socially and environmentally responsible, to better understand Talent Management, and to create places where diverse contributions are maximized for the enterprise's strategic benefit. In short, a commitment to full inclusivity is now a leadership and business competency. Deficiencies here will limit a leader's effectiveness and advancement in much the same way as a lack of financial acumen. There are various facets of D&I as a differentiator:

- ▲▼ Companies that increase diversity create a significant competitive advantage for themselves and their shareholders.
- ▲▼ The ability to recruit and lead a diverse workforce is now a critical business competency within talent management. Companies that do not invest in mastering this competency risk falling behind in the war for talent.
- ▲▼ Companies and managers that don't hold leadership accountable for improving diversity and inclusion hurt their bottom lines.

How can diversity and inclusion be promoted in the workplace?

Diversity at the workplace is essential to

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creating a thriving business, especially when it comes to Employee Engagement. Workplace diversity encourages Creativity and Innovation because every team member, from leadership to frontline employees and mobile workers, brings their own unique backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives to the table. Here are some ways to improve Employee Engagement through Diversity-focused initiatives and Operational processes for the workforce:

Educate Managers on the Benefits of Diversity in the Workplace: When workplace diversity is celebrated, and management is empowered with the appropriate resources, the potential of your workforce becomes unlimited.

Create More Inclusive Workplace Policies: Inclusive strategies that support diversity and inclusion in the workplace such as:

- ▲▼ Allowing employees to take off work for religious holidays that may not be officially observed by the company
- ▲▼ Offering On-site Daycare
- ▲▼ Review your office set up to ensure an inclusive facility, such as the availability of non-gendered restrooms
- ▲▼ Extending the option for flexible work hours

Communicate Clearly and Create Employee-Led Task Forces: Managers should feel confident in their internal communication with employees using inclusive language and avoid making any assumptions. This is a great initial way for managers to set up open and respectful internal communication channels. Regularly ask for feedback from your diverse workforce and create dedicated diversity task forces with team members from every department for candidate recruitment and training. This ensures transparency as well as ownership and buy-in from the whole team.

Offer Meaningful Opportunities for Employee Engagement: Initiatives such as employee survey can help companies find out where employees

CEOs can help their company attract the best—and most diverse—talent by being involved in diversity promotion. Prioritizing Diversity at the workplace through intentional, focused, employee engagement programs support recruiting efforts. It improves overall satisfaction, performance, retention, communicates your company's core values, and bolsters your brand identity and reputation.

like to spend their free time and arrange both work-based activities and external employee engagement outings.

Create Mentorship Programs: Employees with high potential should be offered mentors regardless of their age, race, sex, or other factors. If a company-sponsored mentorship program isn't feasible, there are other ways of providing similar opportunities, including:

- ▲▼ Support Professional Development opportunities by contributing to employees' Continuing Education. The more they know, the happier they are and the more productive they are as employees.
- ▲▼ Connect employees to outside resource groups, like those dedicated to young professionals and women's leadership.
- ▲▼ Make sure your leadership team reflects diversity as well by hiring and promoting diverse candidates into those roles.

While these are all great ways to promote workplace diversity, it's always important to set a good example from the top down. When the C-suite is directly involved in workplace diversity programs or initiatives to improve inclusion, employees take notice.

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the best—and most diverse—talent by being involved in diversity promotion. Prioritizing Diversity at the workplace through intentional, focused, employee engagement programs support recruiting efforts. It improves overall satisfaction, performance, retention, communicates your company's core values, and bolsters your brand identity and reputation.