What Is the Inclusion Paradox?

This brings us to the concept of the Inclusion Paradox, which will be used throughout the book to explore the various cultural dimensions of the Obama Era.

Before we can define the paradox, however, we must first distinguish between diversity and inclusion. These terms are often bandied about as synonyms. While they relate to the same ultimate goal, they are in no way synonymous. In *The*

Inclusion Paradox, I offer a differentiated view of these two terms — one that has resonated with clients in diverse industries and different countries.

Diversity is the mix. Inclusion is making the mix work.[TM]

Many diversity best practices have focused on bringing those who are different in the door. Many of these efforts have been quite successful, and companies have achieved diversity — the mix. But in many places, the mix is not working well. We end up with *diversity without inclusion.* Here, diversity's promise — that greater diversity leads to greater innovation and profitability — dies.

Our inclusion deficiencies show up in higher turnover rates for people of color across the board, and for women in certain companies and industries. The non-budging nature of the different ceilings (glass, concrete, bamboo, tortilla, and rainbow) attests to the fact that inclusion has fallen short of its promise.

Without inclusion, advancement becomes difficult. Good management and leadership skills often are not recognized when they are manifested differently than the organization's mainstream. And, rather than leading to new ways of doing things, "different" ends up being defined as poor performance.

How do we achieve both diversity and inclusion? *For starters, we must challenge the longstanding "best practice" belief that to achieve inclusion we need to minimize differences.* Differences based on gender, race/ethnicity, nationality, faith, income, education, sexual orientation, physical abilities, military experience, and other dimensions are too ingrained, too hard-wired into what makes us *us* and shapes our thinking. Trying to submerge these for the sake of a definition of inclusion rooted in sameness is unrealistic.

Rather than minimizing differences, we need to call them out constructively. Calling out differences has significant implications for workforce policies and programs. "The diversification of the workforce means that the term 'average employee' will soon fade away," says Andy Hiles, benefits thought leader at McKinsey. "Workforce polices and programs designed to support the 'average employee' increasingly miss the mark in meeting employees' needs and desires."

Calling out differences unleashes the true creative contributions of diverse perspectives that play off each other and lead to better work relationships, greater innovation, and profitability that benefit individuals, teams, and organizations. *This is what I refer to as the Inclusion Paradox.*

And throughout, the Obama Era will be the canvas against which we'll explore how to apply the Inclusion Paradox.

A Three-Step Approach to Mastering the Inclusion Paradox

The foundation for creating true inclusion lies in organizations and individuals who can manage these called-out differences. They must possess a bundle of skills, referred to as *crosscultural competence* which entails three fundamental steps for navigating the Inclusion Paradox. Because the levels of awareness are interdependent and sequential, we must master these sequential steps:

1. **It's all about me.** Know who you are and what you believe. What is the foundation for those beliefs? How do you put those beliefs into action? How do others perceive you and your actions?
2. **It's all about them.** Know how others are different. What do you see in others? Why do they act as they do? How are their beliefs reflected in their actions?
3. **It's all about us.** Know how to navigate the gap. Since you can't know everything about everyone, how can you bridge the gap between what you know and don't know about others? When is an issue personal, cultural, or something else? How do you make sure that what you said is actually what is heard? How do you resolve cultural differences to arrive at mutually satisfying solutions?