# What Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Mean to Me and Why They Are Important in Today’s Culture

First, diversity, equity, and inclusion are three very important topics to me. I believe that diversity means representation across a wide range of traits, backgrounds, and experiences. When we can connect and engage with coworkers with different perspectives than our own, we can more successfully achieve our overall goals. Inclusion refers to a sense of belonging in any environment. For an institution to really achieve the benefits of diversity, it has to work to be inclusive in recruiting, hiring, retention, and promotions. Employees in inclusive workplaces feel more comfortable sharing their unique ideas and perspectives because they can sense that their differences are genuinely respected and appreciated.

Finally, equity is important for making sure that every employee’s voice is included in the decision-making process, that everyone feels fairly compensated for their work, and that everyone has access to the same opportunities. It’s very important to me that everyone I work with feels safe, accepted, and valued and has an equal opportunity to grow and succeed. Together, the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion help create a workplace culture that drives the organization forward.

# What Is the Most Challenging Aspect of Working in a Diverse Environment?

Diverse teams drive innovative solutions precisely because they can be challenging. By bringing diverse perspectives to the table, you get more ideas, but also more people pointing out holes in ideas. The debate that can come with differing perspectives pushes everyone to think and work harder. That is one of the most challenging aspects of working in a diverse environment, but it’s a challenge I embrace. For example, if I notice that we’ve gotten to a solution fairly easily but that we haven’t heard from someone on the team, I’ll ask that person to weigh in on the solution. I’ve found that on many occasions, inviting someone into the conversation might mean we’re debating an issue longer, but it also means that we end up with a stronger solution.

# What Is Your Approach to Understanding the Perspectives of Colleagues from Different Backgrounds?

Whether it’s my supervisor to whom I report, or peer, I take the time to get to know everyone I’m working with on a personal basis. Ideally, this takes the form of a scheduled lunch or coffee. However, I also find times like passing each other in the hallway or breakroom to quickly connect on a personal level. I like to know what matters to people outside of work, what drives their engagement at work, the values they hold and why. In my experience, this builds a relationship that helps instill a level of trust. When differences of opinion arise, that level of trust we’ve already established makes it easier to understand one another and work through conflict.

# How Would You Handle a Situation Where a Colleague Was Being Culturally Insensitive, Sexist, Racist, or Homophobic?

If the incident is actively taking place, I view it as my job to interrupt the bias, regardless of who is making the insensitive remark or action. I would directly call out that the insensitive statement or action does not reflect the institution’s values or my own, and that I want it to stop. I might say, ‘We don’t talk like that around here. Please don’t say that around me again.” If I heard about an incident secondhand, I would inform the organization’s human resources team so they are aware of the issue and can address it based on the organization’s anti-discrimination policies.

# How Would You Advocate for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion with Colleagues Who Don’t Understand its Importance?

If I encountered colleagues who are still unaware of the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion, the first step I’d take would be to present them with facts. There’s so much research available touting the financial benefits companies reap when they have a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Of course, I understand that some people may be aware of this research, but still unconvinced. If that were the case, I’d gently but firmly push them to recognize that while diversity might be uncomfortable, it’s worth seeking out a diverse team in order to push ourselves to think beyond our own experiences and assumptions.

I would translate all of that to what it could mean for our own company in particular scenarios. For example, if we were struggling to bring in new audiences within certain demographics, I might mention that a more diverse and inclusive internal team—where people from those demographics have a real voice in discussions about which products are made and how—could that help us achieve our goals.

# Can You Give Me an Example of How You Make Your Direct Reports Feel a Sense of Inclusion, Belonging, and Equity on a Daily Basis?

I believe strongly in ensuring that all members of my team feel capable of success. One way this shows up is in the way I run meetings. I always strive to send out an agenda in advance and welcome additions to the agenda before the meeting begins. This ensures that everyone is able to voice their ideas and concerns, even if they don’t naturally feel comfortable speaking up or don’t do their best thinking on the spot. In the meeting itself, I’m mindful of who is speaking up and whose ideas are getting heard. When necessary, I’ll redirect the conversation to make sure that each person is included in the process and feels good about next steps.

# What Steps Will You Take to Eliminate Bias From Your Hiring Process?

We all know by now that biases are all around us. Unfortunately, they can get in the way of even the most well-intentioned hiring team. In order to minimize bias in my hiring process, I begin by ensuring that the job opening gets broadcast to as many diverse networks as possible. This helps bring in a diverse range of candidates from the start. Then, I make sure to focus on each candidate’s skills and abilities. To the extent possible, I ignore gaps in their career history, which might reflect time off to care for children and disadvantage women. I also ignore college pedigree, which is typically unrelated to performance but can disadvantage people of color. Finally, I use a structured interview process where I make sure to ask every candidate the same questions so that I’m able to evaluate them on the same set of criteria.

In my last role, using these strategies over the course of several years allowed me to grow the most diverse department in the organization and it really boosted our creativity and performance as a team. We simply did better work with more backgrounds and perspectives represented, exceeding our goals every quarter. Other hiring managers started asking about what I was doing differently in the hiring process and I was more than happy to share what had worked for me and brainstorm additional ways to eliminate biases in hiring across the company.