

DIVERSITY

# 5 Strategies for Creating an Inclusive Workplace

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Women of color are entering the workforce in [greater](#) numbers than ever before, bringing education, ambition, and diverse ideas and experiences with them. As a result, they offer corporations a potent force of insight and innovation that will be increasingly needed to meet the needs of a diverse customer base. Yet, despite the value that women of color represent for companies, they're rarely given leadership positions, not to mention roles in the C-suite. Presently, there are no female [black](#) or [Latina](#) CEOs of *Fortune* 500 companies.

For 15 years, the Center for Talent Innovation (CTI) has researched gender and racial dynamics of the workplace. We have ample evidence that women of color face major obstacles that have historically hindered their advancement. In our 2016 report, [Latinos at Work](#), we found that 59% of Latino men and women experienced slights and snubs in the workplace — a number that jumps to 67% when looking at just Latinas. In the same study, we found that 63% of Latino men and women do not feel welcome and included, do not feel invited to share their ideas, or do not feel confident their ideas are heard and valued at work — a figure that rises to 78% for just Latinas.

A similar story rings true for black women. In our 2015 study, [Black Women: Ready to Lead](#), we found that 46% of black women feel their ideas are not heard or recognized. They are also less likely than straight white men to have their ideas endorsed. Furthermore, black women feel invisible: They are more likely to feel their talents aren't recognized by their superiors compared to white women (26% vs 17%). No wonder black women are far more likely than white women (44% vs 30%) to feel stalled in their careers.

Furthermore, women of color are more likely than white women to feel [they must compromise their authenticity](#) if they want be leaders. In our research, 72% of black women, 53% of Latinas, and 52% of Asian women say that “executive presence” at their company is defined as conforming to traditionally white male standards. In contrast, only 44% of white women felt that way.

Now, more than ever, any company that wants to realize the full potential of its employees should be taking action to create safe and inclusive workplaces where women of color can achieve their full potential. We've compiled a few facts that employers, leaders, and managers can use:

- **Emphasize the business case for diversity and inclusion.** There are many reasons why American workplaces must change, but a significant one is that the country is changing demographically, as a recent U.S. Bureau [report](#) makes clear. Consequently, companies need diverse leaders who reflect the changing marketplace. Our [research](#) finds that when workplace teams reflect their target customers, the entire team is more than twice as likely to innovate effectively for their end users.
- **Recognize bias.** No matter how well-prepared women of color are, they won't get a seat at the table unless those at the table allow them to pull up a chair. Companies can [take steps to make this happen](#). One multinational company, for example, developed a leadership program that not only puts high-potential employees on the management track but also targets the supervisors who select the candidates. In de-biasing trainings, supervisors learned to recognize and control their inclinations to nominate candidates who were similar to themselves and instead acknowledge great candidates of color. Black women employees who participated in this reported feeling more engaged and better positioned for advancement opportunities. More importantly, their supervisors committed to offering these women leadership opportunities within one year.

- **Practice inclusive leadership.** Leaders need to create a safe team environment where all employees can [speak up, be heard, and feel welcome](#). They should embrace the input of employees whose backgrounds or expertise differ from their own, and foster collaboration among diverse staff, ask questions of all members of the team, facilitate constructive arguments, give actionable feedback, and act upon the advice of diverse employees. In addition, leaders can make women of color feel valued and included by prizing authenticity over conformity and operating from an understanding that a range of presentation and communication styles can succeed in the workplace.
- **Provide sponsorship programs.** Corporations such as American Express and Bank of America have created programs that accelerate the progress of women and people of color by pairing them with more experienced [sponsors](#) who help them learn the ropes — not just in their first weeks or months on the job, but over the long haul. Our [research](#) shows that a mentor’s advice is not enough; a sponsor’s meaningful advocacy makes all the difference. Our research, for instance, finds that [women of color](#) who say they have sponsors are 81% more likely to be satisfied with their career progression than those without sponsors.
- **Hold leaders accountable.** Make sure that [inclusion is a core value of the organization](#) — not just something you do to “check a box.” For instance, when CTI’s CEO Pat Fili-Krushel was head of HR at Time Warner, they instituted a tracking and reporting system to measure progress against the diversity and inclusion goals for each division. Leaders were held accountable with 10% of their bonuses tied to their goals.

If businesses are to grow and thrive now and in the future, it’s imperative to elevate the voices of women of color and eliminate institutional barriers to their success. In order to do this, business leaders must intentionally address the relentless undertow of discrimination that continues to hinder them from doing their jobs. We must unleash all talent and, in the process, create more profit, equity, and a better world.

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