

DEO ESSENTIALS

Becoming a More Inclusive Leader

Feeling valued and heard is one of the key indicators of whether an employee or student is engaged. It takes time and a concentrated effort by leaders to create real change. Here are some ways to become a more inclusive leader, adapted from Alissa Carpenter’s “10 Ways to Be a More Inclusive Leader” in Thrive Global. go.unl.edu/10ways

- 1. Call attention to unconscious bias.** Whether we are aware of it or not, bias seeps into the hiring and promotion process. We unconsciously favor people who think, look, and experience life similar to us versus people who don’t. It is much easier to relate to these individuals and see where they would “fit” in the organization. Take a look at your department’s social media pages and website and at who sits on your leadership team. Does everyone look similar? What are common “qualifying” characteristics you expect from those “different” than the majority stakeholders in your area?
- 2. Provide a network of support.** Community is paramount in building supportive, inclusive environments. Although we are more digitally connected than ever before, loneliness is at an all-time high with Generation Z deemed “the loneliest generation yet.” This is a problem for many reasons, including the highest suicide rates in history and rise of chronic illness where stress plays a major role. Practice active listening. When we are better listeners, we are trusted. Ask open-ended questions and don’t interrupt. This will allow deeper connection for support and inclusion. It’s not all about what is verbal, make sure to listen to non-verbal cues as well, including emotions (tone, frequency, volume) and body language.
- 3. Create spaces for open dialogue.** It’s one thing to say you are an inclusive leader and another to actually be one. Creating spaces for open dialogue and small talk means conversation on both sides — sharing information about yourself and listening to employees when they share. We can’t expect others to provide personal information if we are not being vulnerable ourselves. Get coffee or appetizers after work or schedule meetings with the first few minutes dedicated to getting to know one another. These small yet important tasks reinforce the elements of human connection.
- 4. Open up seats at the table.** Take a look around. Does everyone think and act like you? Do you all prefer coffee over tea? Cookies over cake? Do you all wear the same colors to work? It’s funny to analyze the similarities with people who have worked together over the years as they become more and more alike. Performing a room analysis on the community could assist in determining the need for a fresh perspective. Mix it up a bit and change your routine to include new thoughts and perspectives. Identify employees who have gone above and beyond and have ideas to share. Look to the university’s diversity and inclusion groups for ideas and insight. Then check out your calendar for upcoming meetings or networking events and invite them to come along. Let them know how valuable their ideas and opinions are and that their contribution is valued.

RESOURCES

- UNL Office of Diversity and Inclusion resources diversity.unl.edu/resources
- UNL TipSheet: Recruiting Diverse Faculty go.unl.edu/diversefaculty
- UNL TipSheet: Inclusive Meetings go.unl.edu/inclusivemeetings
- UNL TipSheet: Creating Gender-Inclusive Educational Environments go.unl.edu/genderinclusive

