Belonging at work: What to include in diversity, equity, and inclusion training

Making the investment in diversity, equity, and inclusion training to foster belonging at work is no longer a nice-to-have for organizations, it's table stakes. Arbinger research has found that [71% of best-in-class organizations prioritize DEI training](#) compared to just 34% of all others. So naturally, if you're an organization that's looking to foster a thriving and innovative culture, it's simply a must.

That being said, with so many DEI solutions on the market, it can be challenging—if not downright overwhelming—to find the "right" option for your organization that's actually going to make an impact. We've shared our take on [why most DEI training programs don't work](#), and it comes down to the fact that most diversity, equity, and inclusion training focuses on modifying behaviors for compliance, rather than getting to the root cause of bias, which is **mindset**.

In this blog post, we're going to explore what to include in [DEI training](#) to make an impact—based on our own proven experience working with thousands of clients worldwide.

True belonging at work starts with mindset

Mindset is the driving force behind peoples' attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions towards diversity-related issues, so it only makes sense for it to be at the heart of DEI training. The thing is, most DEI training programs don't even mention mindset at all.

Without addressing mindset as the root cause of bias, stereotyping, or inequities, we're really only treating the "symptoms" of a much deeper issue. Look below to see some of the symptoms that might be affecting your organizational culture.

Symptoms of workplace bias & stereotyping

Arbinger Institute

1 Exclusionary behavior

2 Microaggressions

3 Lack of representation

4 Tokenism

5 Dismissing concerns

6 Unequal treatment

Rather than simply treating the surface-level implications of workplace bias, it should be our goal to establish an atmosphere of true belonging. It's only then that we can watch connection, collaboration, and innovation transform as people thrive.

To do this, you'll need to do the following:

1. Invite people in rather than

calling them out

Many DEI training programs are centered around compliance: what you can and can't say or do. The issue with this is that prescribing behaviors doesn't really change anything other than how people act. It's not influencing how they see themselves or those around them.

From our work with clients, we know that tools and frameworks are effective ways to operationalize challenging conversations or exercises. So, one that proves really effective during DEI training is our [Bias Self-Assessment tool](.).

With this exercise, we invite participants to discover their own biases by examining themselves first. Whether we're aware of it or not, there are aspects of all of us that we've learned to view as better or worse than others. Perhaps you view your nationality as an advantage. What messages have caused you to shape that bias? Maybe you view your age as worse than others. What's been the impact of that way of thinking in your day-to-day interactions?

Download a copy below to try this exercise for yourself and see how many unconscious biases are present in your life.

	Better-Than	Worse-Than	Depends/Unsure	Messages that Shaped this Bias	Image I have Tried to Portray	What is the Impact?
Gender	☐	☐	☐			
Race	☐	☐	☐			
Age	☐	☐	☐			
Nationality	☐	☐	☐			
Place of Origin	☐	☐	☐			
Marital Status	☐	☐	☐			
Language/Accent	☐	☐	☐			
Religion	☐	☐	☐			
Sexual Orientation	☐	☐	☐			
Physical Body	☐	☐	☐			
Physical Ability	☐	☐	☐			
Education	☐	☐	☐			
Profession	☐	☐	☐			
Position/Role	☐	☐	☐			
Political Views	☐	☐	☐			
	☐	☐	☐			

After completing the exercise, take a moment to think about why it works. Rather than accusing or blaming others for their perceptions, we've empowered them to examine their own biases and uncover in real time how they've impacted their lives.

2. Challenge people to see differently

Once you get people to examine their own biases, the next step is to challenge people to see things differently. Many stereotypes and biases are deeply ingrained, and it's only when they're brought to light that people are forced to challenge them. Sometimes, people choose not to see what they don't understand, and the role of diversity, equity, and inclusion training should be teaching them *how* to see those things.

This video is a great example of how biases can get in the way of seeing something for what it really is:

In order to more effectively see, we have to listen and learn.

Listening, asking questions, and getting curious is key to connecting others—especially from those who are different than us in some way. It's only way for us to really see someone. Otherwise, we just go on with what we already think we know.

For this reason, working to shift perspectives and teaching people how to more effectively listen to others is something that sets an impactful DEI training program apart from the rest. At both work and at home, we can always work to listen better, dispelling discrimination, prejudice, misconceptions, and fear.

We suggest three key areas to focus on when listening to others:

1. Listening to learn *about* the person
2. Listening to learn *from* the person
3. Listening to learn *how I may be mistaken*

Listening with these three areas in mind help create a deeper connection between the listener and the person being listened to. When we hear things we haven't heard before, we begin to really understand the other person, and how the other person feels that they and their views are important.

Failing to listen and learn from those around us gets us stuck in our ways and our own beliefs.

Below is just one example of how stereotypes and misconceptions can creep into even the smallest parts of our day-to-day lives, and how that impacts our way of thinking about, and ultimately seeing, others:

Videos (like the examples shared above) are a great way to get people thinking about other perspectives, and help evoke empathy during diversity, equity, and inclusion training. They challenge us to see things differently by listening to someone speak openly about their experiences. By nature, humans love stories. So video examples that allow us to [see the humanity in others](#) are typically a lot more effective in teaching people to listen than simply talking through concepts.

3. Foster psychological safety

[Fostering psychological safety](#) is a crucial component of diversity, equity, and inclusion training as it forms the bedrock for inclusive learning environments. When individuals feel safe to express themselves without fear of judgment or reprisal, they're more likely to actively engage in discussions and activities that create deeper understanding and empathy with their colleagues.

To foster psychological safety in DEI training environments, we suggest facilitating breakout groups for discussions. You can break people into groups to discuss a video, answer a question, or work through an exercise. The key is to keep the groups small so that people feel safe to share. It can be intimidating to get vulnerable in front of a large group of coworkers, but sharing thoughts in a small group of two or three is much more approachable.

Integrating psychological safety into DEI training ensures that participants from diverse backgrounds feel respected and valued, creating a conducive atmosphere for learning and growth. Without it, there's a risk of perpetuating power dynamics and marginalizing certain voices, undermining the effectiveness of the training. Swapping blame for curiosity, timely, consistent recognition, and room for experimentation because fear of failure can be a barrier for individuals to take risks, speak up, and bring new ideas to the table.

Fear of failure can be a barrier for individuals to take risks, speak up, and bring new ideas to the table, so in order to foster more innovation, your DEI training program should empower employees to swap blame for curiosity, implement consistent recognition, and make room for experimentation.

Without psychological safety, employees may hesitate to fully engage in their work, leading to decreased morale, productivity, and ultimately hindering the organization's success. Prioritizing psychological safety creates a foundation for diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives to thrive, fostering a positive and supportive work environment for all employees.

Transform team dynamics with effective DEI training

When people feel safe to speak up, understand how to listen, and know how to examine their own biases, it promotes open communication and collaboration, leading to increased creativity and innovation within teams. The ways in which your team will be changed by incorporating belonging at work are truly transformative to all areas of your organization. It starts in small steps, and it can start as early as today.

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