

What Inclusion does for Retention



It is Black History Month, a beautiful time to celebrate Black voices, experiences, and stories throughout history and in the present moment. For organizations participating in the celebration, it can be a great time to show support for the Black community and cultivate a culture of belonging and inclusion. This can look different from company to company, but it should be done with intention.

There have been many scenarios where “well-intended” efforts have created more tension than unity during Black History Month. This usually looks like corporations and individuals making performative actions rather than genuine appreciation for Black culture. People can see right through those sentiments, especially those in your organization.

When organizations are deciding what they will be doing to celebrate Black History Month, there are a few things to consider.

How to Think About Black History

Month in Your Organization

First, understanding what Black History Month is meant to be. This starts with doing research, having honest conversations, and opening up to new ways of thinking and seeing people. So, what is it meant to be? Our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) expert, Desmond Lomax shares this perspective:

“Black History Month is about making space to celebrate a culture of excellence. It is an opportunity to acknowledge the many incredible contributions of the Black community in America. Recognizing that diversity is good, and this month is a dedicated moment to honor Black culture, but it should not be the only month this happens.”

When this month is not treated as a celebration of culture, people tend to be treated as objects rather than people. It becomes more about needing to be seen as , which leads to performative gestures and exploitation. This may not be intentional, but it is not up to other people to know that it is up to you.

If you are only focused on the task of getting something out there or making a statement, you will forget who you are impacting. At the end of the day, it is the people in your organization who will be impacted most by the decisions made. Here are a few questions to help guide you in your decision making:

- Who would be impacted by this decision?
- Is there anyone or any group that needs to be consulted?
- What is the mindset driving this decision?
- What is the end goal?

You can see how those questions open up biases, motivations, and blind spots that could go unnoticed if not checked. As helpful as these questions are, there is an even better way.

The Better Way

Most DEI experts ask how messages in February translate to the rest of the year. To put it plainly, is this the only month where there is a mention of celebrating diversity in culture? There is some work to do if the answer is yes, but we are here to help. Here are three tips to get you started building a culture that incorporates equity, diversity, and inclusion practices throughout the year:

1. Assess how current employees feel about inclusion and belonging

The first step in creating belonging is to value each voice and let those voices be heard. Take time to stop and ask your employees about their experiences in the workplace. This will start building trust and give people a place to share their honest thoughts. This can be done through internal surveys, one on ones with managers, and reviewing websites like Glassdoor or Indeed. The more information, the better.

2. Review and report the findings

Once you have finished the assessment, report on the findings to the whole organization. Transparency will build trust and create a sense of unity from top to bottom. It will also promote a culture of accountability, where people get to have a voice and help move initiatives forward.

3. Adjust efforts based on employee feedback

After getting feedback, it's time to start making the necessary changes. Implementing new policies surrounding DEI and doing the work of training employees so, they have the tools to continue the work.

Keep in mind, the work does not end here. Continue to ask employees about their experiences with workplace culture.

Maintain and promote transparency and accountability. Establish a regular cadence of gathering feedback, reporting results, and adjusting your efforts.

To summarize, the better way is to build a culture where celebrating diversity is normal and conversations regarding culture happen regularly. It does not only happen during Black History Month, Juneteenth, Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, or any other month dedicated to celebrating different cultures. Continued success looks like reframing how you think about the goal you want to accomplish and making sure the people it will affect most are invited to participate in the process. When it's a part of the culture, you see the people in your organization as people who deserve to be celebrated year-round.