

Facet: Inclusiveness

“Do You Feel Like This Every Day?” From Inclusion to Belonging

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Most of us have faced situations when we weren't sure how to fit in. During a session I facilitated with a group of executives, one of the leaders, a white male, stood up to tell this story. Another member of the group, one of his best friends, was black. When attending the **friend's 50th birthday party**, he and his wife found they were the only white people in the room.

Everyone at the party was very warm and friendly, but he felt uneasy – **like he didn't belong**. The music was unfamiliar to him. The food was not what he and his wife were used to. **He didn't know what to talk about. He almost felt as if he were in a foreign country. He was very uncomfortable. He didn't know what to do.**

At the time, he never said anything to his friend. **In fact, he didn't mention it to anyone.** But here in the facilitated session, in front of his peers, he felt moved to ask his friend a question. **With his voice shaking, he asked his friend, “Do you feel like that every day!?”**

How did his friend respond? **“I *do* feel that way at some point every day,” he said softly.**

It took being in his friend's shoes to enable him to suddenly feel what his friend must feel at work every day. He just never knew. None of this is surprising when you look at the research, which shows that people in a minority spend 20-30% of each day worrying about trying to fit in and belong.

20-30% of the time!



While this may seem like a lot to people in the majority, I assume that when the white executive above was at his friend's party, he spent 100% of his time worrying about it.

While he was “included” (he was invited and everyone was friendly), he didn’t feel like he *belonged*. It is an important concept for leaders who want to make sure everyone on the team feels they can be authentic to who they really are. If we want to create a genuine feeling of belonging, asking women, people of color, people from other functions, and people from lower levels to simply be on your team or attend your meetings is not enough.

Our research in effective leadership has revealed that there are certain qualities leaders can develop that help organizations create a sense of belonging.

3 Qualities of Leadership that Foster “Belonging”

The research is drawn from data collected through the [Bates ExPI™](#). The data reveal that three of the 15 qualities of leadership we measure in the assessment can be especially important to belonging. When a leader receives feedback on his or her strengths and gaps, it enables them to create an action plan for their own development. Improving in these areas helps leaders raise the bar in this important area.

Inclusiveness. **Inclusiveness addresses a leader’s ability to not only get the right people to the table but to give them a real voice and a sense of belonging once they’re present.** Here are a few behaviors from the ExPI assessment that help to indicate a leader’s inclusiveness:

- Uses an approach that empowers others to participate in important matters
- Actively involves those who have a stake in the issues and a relevant viewpoint to offer
- Expresses a refreshing curiosity and interest in the ideas of others

Concern. **Concern addresses a leader’s ability to demonstrate interest in others and promote a healthy sustainable culture.** This includes displaying behaviors such as:

- Genuinely cares about people as individuals
- Takes time to listen and leaves others feeling heard
- Encourages others to experiment, trust themselves, try new things

Resonance. **Resonance establishes a leader’s ability to be attuned to the thoughts and feelings of others.** Some behaviors that point to resonance include:



- Conveys an attitude of tolerance and openness
- Often able to help others clarify their concerns and feelings
- Makes you feel part of something bigger, important, meaningful

Just including people is not enough. We must also help them feel they belong. And, that takes an intentional effort to make people feel they can be their authentic self.

Where do you begin to create an environment of belonging?

For starters, how about asking people to share their stories of when they felt they did or **didn't belong? You'll be amazed about what people say.** And just by allowing everyone to share their stories, people will begin to feel like they belong.

From there, you can get people to share "what good would look like" six months from now if everyone had a greater sense of inclusion and belonging than they do today. Paint a picture of what your inclusive team would be, and then figure out which brushstrokes you need to add each week to make it a reality.

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