

# Be an UNCOMFORTABLY INCLUSIVE leader

Uncomfortable inclusion provides valuable leadership lessons.

Humans are, by and large, not a solitary species. We strongly favor inclusion.

And, if we are not around other people, we fail to harness our true potential as individuals and as teams. That's because much of our lives, careers and personal relationships cannot flourish without other people to watch, learn from and relate to. Not to mention there are serious pathological consequences to our well-being when we are deprived of human interaction for any substantial period of time.

Given this innate need and desire of most humans, the level of inclusiveness in any organization should be a part of any cultural conversation. Even if it causes us discomfort to be inclusive, we should always find a way to include others if we want to achieve our goals and those of the team.

Uncomfortable inclusion includes learning from your mistakes and listening to your mentors, especially when they give you "hard to hear" feedback. Admittedly, when I started out in my professional career and eventually began to manage people in various roles, I was not very inclusive. When I was inclusive early on it was either because I liked the people I was including, it was by accident, or one of my bosses was forcing me to be inclusive of others. I was immature and I felt like if the job was going to be done right, I had to do it myself and the involvement of others was a nuisance.

My management style was driven by the false notion that I had to be the hierarchical leader making the important decisions, driving process and actually doing the job on the front lines. I was under the impression that this was the meaning of leading by example. It wasn't until a very seasoned executive I was reporting to



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back then impressed upon me the true meaning and power of inclusion. Once I began to make inclusion a priority, the sky was the limit. I succeeded in that role and it has ultimately led to my success as a CEO.

Focus on the successes and inclusion of others. Leaders who change their mindsets to focus on the successes and inclusion of others – rather than to satisfy their own ego – build decision equity, which will lead to better results.

Before I became uncomfortably inclusive early in my career, I did pretty well advancing my career and accomplished some goals. Then my boss told me I was failing as a director and even put something to that effect in my performance appraisal. I was devastated and confused. She explained to me that I was burning myself out with clinical procedures and case activity at all hours of the day and night, which left very little mental attention to strategy and the effective planning that comes with being a director level leader.

I was still acting like a manager. I failed to recognize the difference of my role as a director in the need to develop those around me, by being inclusive of them so that they could grow and I could learn myself. I eventually paid attention and was able to reach new levels of achievement personally and on behalf of the collective good of the team.

The organization will follow your lead, so if you are not inclusive, others will not be either, and

that will not lead to collective success. Ease up and let others in on your decision-making process. That approach will create a brain trust of decision makers around you who will offer unique perspectives, which will lead to better decisions and innovation.

Be humble and grateful for those who contribute to your success – above all else. The journey never ends. Once the lesson of uncomfortable inclusion became clearer, I reflected back on several personal and professional achievements throughout my life. I took inventory of all the people involved in my successes at different stages of these milestones, and I realized that none of my advancements would have been accomplished had it not been for the support and involvement of others.

This innate and powerful human condition of inclusion came to life for me, and I decided to double down on it. I became uncomfortably inclusive in all aspects of my leadership roles including in my personal life and the results were incredible. I decided that if I was not uncomfortable, I was not being inclusive enough.

Upon being appointed as the president/CEO of a failing organization, I deployed a mindset of uncomfortable inclusion and we quickly became a world-leading enterprise, which is still true almost 10 years later. When you are inclusive to the point of discomfort, you will accomplish things well beyond what you might have accomplished as an individual, and others will support you. ■

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