

CEP Magazine – April 2021 Diversity and inclusion start with us

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In 2020, SCCE & HCCA created a Diversity & Inclusion Committee made up of veteran compliance professionals, including a few members of our board. This group will discuss the role of the compliance and ethics profession, and therefore the role of this organization, in the ongoing battle for improved workplace environments in relation to race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, and all other aspects of diversity and inclusion. The author of this article, a committee member, has chosen to focus on one of the most often discussed issues. To learn more about the committee, please see Gerry Zack's column in this issue of CEP Magazine.

"Really? You don't like math? I thought Asians like math, and they are so good at it."

That's a response I often get when people find out that I don't really like math—something that I guess I am supposed to like. I always take these comments as compliments and very much appreciate people's strong faith in my ability to solve complicated math problems. Personal satisfaction aside, sociologists and psychologists have long pointed out that we all make judgments about others and often assume that a person fitting in one category based on their appearance or behavior has all the characteristics of the members of that group; this is also known as stereotyping. Consciously or not, people label, characterize, and categorize each other by commonality, including shared beliefs (religious or other), physical resemblance (age, race, etc.), behavioral traits (e.g., gender), etc. Naturally, we have all experienced it one way or another—positive or negative—in our personal and professional lives, whether we are aware or not. With all the challenges we have seen in 2020, now more than ever, we recognize the importance of a more diverse culture and an open-minded attitude toward our differences.

Led by its vision, mission, and an acute understanding of the needs of its members, Society of Corporate Compliance & Ethics (SCCE) & Health Care Compliance Association (HCCA) has formed a diversity and inclusion work group consisting of compliance leaders from a variety of industries. It is dedicated to promoting an open dialogue, mutual respect, and understanding among people—regardless of our age, gender, ethnic background, or religious belief. One person's power and influence may be limited, but together we can make a difference. This article aims to share some practical tips to help compliance professionals create a more inclusive workplace with your teams.

The high value of diversity and inclusion to organizations

According to the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary, diversity is defined as "the condition of having or being composed of differing elements,"^[1] and inclusion means "the act or practice of including and accommodating people who have historically been excluded (as because of their race, gender, sexuality, or ability),"^[2] among other things. Applied in practice, diversity refers to the representation or composition of a group or entity, and inclusion is illustrated by the level of acceptance, appreciation, and integration of people's uniqueness. Diversity and inclusion (D&I) as a combined mission is not solely centered on the topic of skin color, for example; rather, it

takes into account a wide range of characteristics among people, including perspectives. The presence or absence of initiatives related to D&I can indicate an individual's mindset, an organization's culture, a society's level of acceptance and openness, and so much more.

Science tells us that there are no two identical leaves of any plants and that each is unique. So are we. We all bring in different views, expertise, and skill sets based on our personal upbringing, family backgrounds, values, and beliefs that can complement, balance, and perfect our overall approaches when analyzing a case or handling a situation. Learning about a different view can broaden our minds and help us see things from a brand-new perspective. For example, when making a business decision, it is crucial to consider and weigh all the pros and cons involved so that the entity's exposure to potential risks can be reduced and minimized.

A diverse workforce with a diverse set of ideas strengthens and improves a company's process and systems. One simple analogy can illustrate it well: Although broccoli is good, eating it solely without a variety of other foods can cause nutrition deficits, which will result in a weaker immune system that will likely undermine the quality of life. A diverse and balanced diet strengthens a person's immune system. The same holds true for a company, as well as a society. By respecting employees and their unique needs, the organization earns deeper trust and more commitment from its workforce. Therefore, an emphasis on D&I cultivates a more tolerant, accepting, and inspiring environment that sparks innovation, creativity, and discussion, which in turn leads to the long-term success of a company and even the strengthening of a society's culture.

Further, fostering a D&I culture can help organizations attract and retain more talented individuals, significantly increasing organizations' competitiveness in the market. When current employees are confident that the organization is supportive of them as individuals, regardless of their ages, genders, and ethnicities, they are more likely to thrive and build longevity within the company where they have gained a sense of belonging. When there is less turnover, there is more stability, and the company is able to allocate resources to other efforts, such as innovation and business development. To prospective employees, the interview process alone can clearly indicate the importance of D&I in an organization's culture. If candidates get an impression that the culture is a neutral or even exclusive one regarding diversity, the organization risks losing those who would have been valuable team members.

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