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DE&I Executive Order, Now What

Given this shifting landscape, it is critical for leaders to understand what's at stake and how they can continue to foster a fair, inclusive, merit-based workplace while ensuring compliance with evolving legal frameworks. Striking a balance between ensuring fairness for all employees and supporting initiatives that allow underrepresented groups to thrive can be complex. To navigate this terrain and achieve a balance, organizations can turn to structured guidance like BEAM, the five-point framework developed by SHRM, to provide a clear path forward.

The BEAM Framework: Ensuring Inclusive and Merit-Based Programs

1. **Anti-Exclusion:** Are the program's opportunities open to all without regard to an individual's sex, race, or any other protected status?
2. **Access for All:** Does the program generate opportunities to participate based on an individual's requisite merit, including their existing skills and proficiencies?
3. **Merit-Driven:** Does the program select individuals to participate based on relevant qualifications while accommodating protected medical conditions and religious practices?
4. **Unbiased and Available Information:** Is the availability of the program effectively communicated to all individuals so that participation is truly open to all?
5. **Skills-First Optimization:** Does the program provide opportunities to develop relevant skills, qualifications, and experience for all individuals eligible to participate?

By applying these questions, organizations can ensure that their I&D initiatives are inclusive, fair, and legally sound. The framework also highlights the importance of aligning I&D efforts with business goals to optimize talent and support a more inclusive work environment. Achieving this alignment is not only necessary for creating fair opportunities but is also crucial for driving business success.

Focus on Talent Retention

Employers should be making the right investments to retain employees because turnover is costly. Investing in talent retention is critical instead of recruitment and there are four areas employers can focus on in our uncertain markets.

Workplace flexibility - One of the main drivers of retention is a hybrid work strategy with strong communication and a focus on flexibility. The only benefit valued more than a competitive salary is workplace flexibility, followed closely by incentive pay and "generous paid time off."

Enforcing a return-to-work or on-site policy tends to spike retention challenges, according to a recent survey by the Conference Board data showed; forty-five percent of employers enforcing on-site work policies stated they had retention difficulties, compared to 15% of those with flexible policies. Employers who enforce on-site work policies have significantly more difficulty retaining employees than those who allow them to choose their work location.

Growth and development - Employee development opportunities, including both learning programs and an internal talent marketplace, make employees more likely to stick around long term. More than half of employees previously surveyed by the Conference Board said they would likely leave a job if they didn't receive any development opportunities. Additionally, an internal talent marketplace may help workers envision themselves staying at the company for a long period of time because they would know what opportunities are available. Offering substantial Learning and Development programming could be a key point of investment for employers.

Compensation and benefits - Comprehensive rewards packages foster a sense of loyalty and commitment and reduce the likelihood of employees seeking financial opportunities elsewhere. Compensation planning outside of simple pay increases includes increasing promotions, working toward internal pay equity and focusing on skill-based raises. But these approaches require employers to regularly assess their programs to ensure they are meeting employee needs. Health insurance, retirement

plans, child care and professional development are all part of the total rewards package.

Leadership and culture - A worker's experience with an employer is often directly affected by their manager and leadership of an organization. Employees want a "culture of care, value and belonging," which can be nurtured through onboarding programs that link new workers with others in the organization, well-being programs that include aspects such as sabbaticals for long service, and "stay interview" programs that help managers understand what keeps a worker around and what is challenging them.

While compensation and job security are critical factors in retention, workers today are more focused on respect, meaningful work, career growth, flexibility, and alignment with organizational values. Employers who focus on these areas have happier employees and higher retention.

Four Key Pillars that Build Trust

Trust is the foundation for strong relationships, in the workplace, and building trust is crucial for managers, especially for new managers. It creates a positive work environment where workers feel valued and motivated, leading to better collaboration, innovation, and overall team success.

Think back to a team project you were on. Did ideas flow freely? Did everyone feel motivated and heard? Or was communication strained, collaboration difficult, and tension thick in the air? The key difference? Trust. Just like a strong building needs a solid foundation, a high-performing team thrives on trust. While trust can develop over a period of time, effective leaders can accelerate the process. There are four key pillars that build trust and how they might play out in a workplace situation.

Transparency - Imagine you're working on a project with a deadline looming. Your leader keeps pushing back on giving details about the bigger picture or any potential roadblocks. Frustrating, right? Transparency is about being an open book with your team, sharing both good news and challenges as much as you are able to.

Consider an example. Anna, a marketing manager, holds weekly team meetings where she discusses upcoming campaigns, outlines potential budget constraints, and even shares feedback from clients. This open communication keeps everyone informed, builds credibility, and allows her team to proactively address any issues.

Authenticity - Have you ever admired a leader who readily admits they don't have all the answers? Authenticity is about being genuine and relatable. It shows your team you're human, approachable, and willing to learn alongside them. Microsoft's CEO, Satya Nadella, has openly discussed his personal struggles raising a child with special needs, sharing honestly about how raising his son has influenced his leadership and corporate culture approach. As a result of his personal experiences, Nadella has made accessibility a top priority in product development, as well as hiring neurodivergent employees through initiatives like the Autism Hiring Program.

Consistency - Imagine a leader who sets ambitious goals but constantly misses deadlines or changes priorities on a whim. Trust takes a hit, right? Consistency means following through on commitments and leading by example. It also means being consistent in your behavior and how you show up every day. Consider a common scenario. A manager promises to delegate tasks but then micromanages everything. This inconsistency breeds frustration. But if they were to consistently delegate and empower their team members, the manager could build trust and foster ownership.

Empathy - Empathy is more than just feeling sorry for someone. It's about actively listening and understanding their perspective. An empathetic leader takes time to learn about their team members' needs and challenges. Let's consider an example of active listening in action. During a one-on-one meeting, Nia, a customer service manager, notices her employee seems stressed. She actively listens and asks open-ended questions, offering support and resources. This demonstrates empathy and creates a safe space for open communication.

Remember, these four qualities – transparency, authenticity, consistency, and empathy – are the pillars of trust. The stronger these pillars are, the stronger the foundation of trust between you and your team will be.

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