



## Executive Summary

### Four Perspectives: The Workplace Experience--and Why a Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion is More Crucial than Ever

#### How their identities and backgrounds shaped their careers:

**Pam:** "In 20 years, there's not a lot of change that's happening." When she started in PR, she was often the only POC within her role in her team/company--and that hasn't changed much. So, what's her legacy? What does she want to leave behind?

**Troy:** His Uncle Larry inspired him--he came from the South, went to NYC for an opportunity, became a lawyer on Wall Street and climbed to a chairman of his company. "The myth of who he was really turned my career around." Because he had access to people with opportunities, he learned soon that he had to network with those "on the other side of the aisle." He became network-centric and value-centric (the latter of which required him to work longer hours and do more work to further prove himself if the "cards were already stacked against [him]").

**Liz:** She went to 45 doctors, trying 36 different treatments and moved to three places get better. Last year, she went to over 100 doctor appointments and spent \$20,000 out of pocket. She's one of the 130,000 people with disabilities. She's also one of the 10% of those with disabilities in the workplace. Disability discrimination: It's another challenge for people who are "abled-presenting" and it's not just about lack of accessibility (i.e.: Sharp's container in the bathroom or a ramp).

Disability needs to be a part of the conversation and not just a "side piece" of DE&I initiatives.

**Esther-Mireya:** Also agrees that she's often the only POC in the room, and that only grows more pronounced in executive roles. "And that's completely unacceptable." We must address this. What legacy is she leaving behind her children and other Black and Brown children: "This cannot be the world that she inherits."

#### Where have orgs fallen short with DE&I initiatives?

**Esther:** "A lot of organizations are dealing with DE&I like it's a communications problem, that can be solved with communications."

- Solutions given: Company-wide memos, social media posts, and "pretty language."
- "That's not the issue, so that's not the solution."
- What happens is a lot of words, but no actions that are followed through.
- As communicators, we must PUSH for real action and change.
  - "As communicators that are being tasked with this work, we need to step up to the plate and really push for action, and have a voice, and have a seat at the table and say,

'It is not enough to put out a statement. It is not enough to say we support Black Lives Matter. It is not enough to say we don't support racism in or organization.'

**Liz:** There aren't enough disability surveys within the workforce, so accommodations aren't being made.

- Those with disabilities don't feel they can come forward and get them
- Workplace leaders don't know about resources like AskJan (gives a list of possible accommodations per disability)
- Words and plans are important, but have to be matched with action.
- Don't leave disability behind, as it often is.

**Pam:** Action is crucial. "The words aren't enough anymore."

- Communicators are well-placed to fight for change and action, and say efforts aren't enough.
- Comms pros know all the stakeholder and look across the organization, so we have to be at the table
- Show the risk down the road and the business hits when falling short
- Have to say, "Don't tell me about them, show me."

**Troy:** Start with hiring diverse employees.

- Action really comes down to pipeline and retention.
- There aren't enough comms companies or other orgs (outside of financial institutions like Morgan Stanley, JP Morgan, Blackstone) working with direct service orgs. It's a key opportunity to have security in having quality, diverse and passionate individuals to join your organization.
- Look at orgs such as:
  - America Needs You
  - Management & Leadership of Tomorrow
  - MLT
- Also look to create ERGs with clear missions and strategies that create an inclusive environment and positive company culture. These should work with HR and the company.
- These steps can help strengthen your pipeline as well as improve retention.

**Esther:** Succession planning is crucial. If you don't, POC, women and other diversity are absent.

- "It's not enough just to recruit people, put them in positions and then weed them out when it's time to give people seats at the table." There's a ceiling with these marginalized groups.
- Hire--but then support these employees' growth and support throughout their career journey.

- It's not a love issue. It's business. What motivates people at the end of the day is revenue, and profit growth, and the success of their business." DE&I is crucial for your business. It's not just a "nice thing to have."
- Communicators have to persuade buy-in from the C-Suite with business arguments (diversity increases innovation, understanding market share, etc.)--not the moral imperative.

### **What role can communicators play in advocating for action?**

**Pam:** Before looking across the organization, look at what you and your team are doing.

- Invest in what you believe in. So, if your leadership says DE&I is important, tell them to "put your money and resources where your mouth is."
- MUST invest in these programs to have any real impact.
- Treat measuring success like any other campaign: Objectives, evaluation points, where you'll be a year from now
- "We have to be methodical at this point. Good wishes and liking people and all that "kumbaya stuff has gotten us nowhere. There is something wrong about how we fundamentally approach ... the hiring, how we approach the grooming of talent ... it's a head-scratcher."
- There are many POC communicators who should be in high positions and aren't. There's something wrong.
- "We're not going to like what we see under the hood, but we're going to face it." You have to be willing to face what you're doing wrong and what you must do to fix it.
- Don't change because you HAVE to, but because it's the right thing to do.

**Liz:** To increase disability rights, be the advocate in the room and bring that conversation forward.

- When DE&I gets brought up, mention disability. Make it a part of that conversation. Don't allow it to be ignored.
- Bring statistics with you to show the importance! It's big for the company line.
  - Accenture report: Orgs. that champion people with disabilities in the workplace have:
    - 2x more shareholder value
    - 28% increase in revenue
- You have to have a program to both fix the pipeline issue as well as supporting, retaining and promoting disabled talent.

- You want differently-abled people in the workplace for innovation. “Text was invented by someone who was deaf. The universal remote was invented by someone who was blind. ...One of the reasons you want diversity in the room is innovation.”
- Being an advocate is hard work, but important.

**Troy:** Because most organizations don’t have a chief diversity officer, communicators must bridge that gap.

Pass along resumes of diverse professionals in your network and from your university. Push for HR and other departments to look at them or increase diverse hires.

Speak at conferences and speak out. Encourage people to join the comms industry and your organization.

Join or ERGs and other efforts with missions and values that support DE&I

“Create the change from within.”

“At a societal level, continue to tell your story. In many ways, people are uncomfortable or fear what they don’t understand, so as you continue to tell your story, no matter where you come from. Whether you’re speaking from ethnicity standpoint or from a disability standpoint, once you tell your story, people realize they have more in common with you rather than different.”

**Esther:** DE&I is a job.

- Many POC communicators are tasked additionally with DEI efforts, even though they’re not experts.
- “It’s a skill, profession and discipline, and needs to be treated as such.”
- When you’re at the table, push for resources. DE&I should be respected, hired for, and given the same support as any other career.
- We must have the uncomfortable conversations. You have to point out the flaws and the ways you’re falling short along with what you should do.
- Especially point out when you need the resources you need--especially a DE&I head and department.
- “We need to be deliberate in our asks, and we need to ask more from the companies we work for.”

### **Is it genuine when communicators stand for DE&I?**

**Pam:** It’s crucial for us to have these hard conversations, but it’s also exhausting--we don’t have a shut-off light.

Consuming inequities all day long is hard. POC advancing these efforts need to practice self-care.

It’s a marathon, not a sprint. Prepare for the long game.

“We need allies. Allies are not minorities in these organizations. They are the decision makers. And we need the chairmans, the CEOs, the boards, we need the people with the money to advocate for this agenda as well.”

### **How can you be an advocate without speaking for a group that you’re not part of?**

**Troy:** Information is key.

Reach out to experts and information, so you’re empowered to speak on their behalf.

Have all the facts.

Then bring people in as well. Invite them to the table with you! Don’t be afraid to turn to them.

**Esther:** Let data be your guide.

- “You don’t need to be a Brown person to know your company has only 1% Brown people. You don’t need to be a Brown person to know that stat and to share it. You don’t need to be a woman to know that your company only has one woman in the C-suite.”
- Data is black and white--it is or it isn’t.
- Come armed with data and use that to ask the tough questions.
- Many people are afraid to speak up--and the facts and information will help embolden you with bravery to have those conversations.

**Liz:** Acknowledge your own identity and privilege.

Make your stance known that you want to be an ally and are approaching that conversation from that angle.

### **Set Measurable DEI Goals, Tie Them to Business Objectives and Continuously Improve on Them**

Overall, DE&I allows businesses to be more agile, more innovative and resilient.

Some of the benefits to a diverse workforce:

1. Multiplied perspectives and workflows that allow for fresh outside-the-box thinking/problem solving
2. Higher employee engagement/employee investment in the work of the business
3. Opportunities to enter new markets with the guides to help businesses navigate these important communities
4. More desirable workplace to recruit better talent

Some numbers:

- Diverse companies outperform their competition by 35%.
- The number of people of color in leadership roles/executive/CEO remains under 20%.

- Companies with gender diversity are more likely to experience above average profitability.

On setting goals:

- **Set a baseline.** Get employee feedback with surveys and focus groups. Do employees report psychological safety? Trust in leadership? How effective were past DE&I efforts?
- **Identify gaps.** Where do you fall short? How prevalent are micro-agressions? Are diverse people getting promotions?
- **Solutions.** What tactics can then solve these gaps? Is it attendance at D&I workshps? Where on the interview process do diverse candidates typically fall off?
- **Evaluate.** Take it back to a wide-angle view. How is your progress being felt in the company as a whole? **Note:** This can be frustrating. Employee sentiment is often based on softer data. So it's difficult to measure incremental change, but the gathering of this data is still important.

Get good data:

- Have as much rigor around your data collection for DE&I as you do for other core business objectives and programs.
- Avoid vanity metrics. Don't collect data that only tells half of the story because it is convenient.

What can be measured?

- **HR.** Number of job descriptions overhauled with inclusive language, number of diverse candidates in the hiring pipeline, retention rates
- **Employee engagement.** Attendance at internal events and trainings, ERG group membership, increase in reported trust in leadership
- **Public reputation.** Diversity of board of directors, Customer and supplier diversity, number of diverse job applicants

### **The Snowball Effect**

Don't let the size of the task keep you from getting started.

Start small and then build towards bigger and bigger goals. Pick one challenge to confront. And then use the data that reflects the small start to get leadership buy in as you make the case for more investment.

### **Policy and practices are not enough**

- Don't rely solely on D&I practices and policies.
- Often they are not always felt at the team level because they are not executed consistently across different management teams. Experience of employees can differ. Practices and policies can be approached in a transactional way, but the true practice is in the relationship between individuals.

- While we often go to qualitative numbers to understand the D&I business case, the qualitative data is just as important.
- Leadership buy in and participation is crucial for success.

### **Betterment: How to Improve DEI transparency, address and respond to shortcomings and criticisms**

- The U.S. is experiencing a fresh fire of social justice awakening in 2020.
- communicators have a special role—and responsibility—in continuously pushing for equality.
- DE&I has never been a more central topic. Communicators must keep the momentum going and hold leaders accountable for promises made.
- Even for companies with a dreadful record on DE&I issues, this is a pivotal time for honest internal assessments. “Admitting culpability is the first step toward some measure of healing and progress,” Flowers says.
- Publicly acknowledging past failures is important, but internal dialogue is essential. You must prioritize your “own house” and make sure staffers are privy to information before the public.
- To douse potential PR fires before they spread—or to prevent others from “narrating your own story”—Romain touts the importance of continuous media monitoring. Categorize sentiment (neutral, negative, positive, etc.) on topics pertaining to your business, and track how the conversation is shifting in real time.
- If your company does come under scrutiny, Flowers says to be transparent and to “discuss the path moving forward.”
- Flowers shares how a client deftly navigated public criticism. The company posted a letter written by critics on its website, and then crafted a thoughtful response that admitted DE&I hasn’t a priority—until now. The company then launched an action plan to redress past mistakes, which included a change of leadership, an “equity audit” to uncover unconscious biases, and a strategic communication plan to provide updates as changes happen.
- Cutting a check to a worthy organization is always fine, but money alone won’t atone.

### **Preparing for change—and action**

- Communicators and execs should be prepared to respond to staffers’ reactions to current events. Romain cites the [Milwaukee Bucks’ last-minute playoff game boycott over racial injustice](#).
- How would you respond if your employees organized a walkout or a similar protest?
- Having direct, consistent conversations with staffers and stakeholders is crucial.
- “Don’t rush your response to complex events,” Romain says. It’s OK if you don’t have all the answers right away.

- Take consistent, anonymous pulse surveys that extract feelings folks might not otherwise share.
- Anonymous surveys are also a great data source to share with leaders. Execs—many of whom are deeply disconnected from their employees’ experiences, concerns, lives and communities—must hear raw honesty to understand what’s really happening.
- It’s also wise to seek external feedback, such as through introspective conversations with community organizations that have an objective voice.
- Romain shares that the NBA has a slew of ERGs (for staffers of color, LGBT workers, veterans, Hispanic employees etc.) that provide a gold mine of strategic insights for the league’s messaging. For ERGs to succeed, however, these groups must be more than morale boosters or token affinity groups. ERGs require investment and executive backing. They should also be deeply involved in your company’s communication campaigns to prevent tone-deaf gaffes and ensure inclusivity.

### **Don’t wait until something goes wrong**

- Every company can potentially improve its DE&I efforts. But it’s crucial to set realistic, specific goals and objectives.
- Whatever it is you hope to achieve, start with gathering data. Tap partners, local nonprofits and even vendors for raw feedback and expertise. “Build the business case for what you want to achieve and work toward—not just because it’s the right thing to do,” Flowers says.
- What are your DE&I weaknesses? Where have you failed in the past? Whatever it is, prioritize long-term progress over short-term, quick hits. DE&I is marathon, not a sprint.
- Romain offers a reminder that you can’t and won’t please everyone. It’s great to take a stand, but “Do responsible and helpful things that are non-partisan and apolitical,” she says.
- Regardless of the issue at hand, be authentic. Don’t say one thing internally and do another on social media. Align your strategies with your “core audiences” in mind, and continually fight for a better place at the decision-making table.
- Communicators can exert much more influence as strategic counselors rather than last-minute firefighters or mere “order takers.” Securing that sort of internal authority is the first step in becoming a more powerful ally for DE&I progress.

### **Allyship and Beyond: What Communicators and Organizations Need to Do Today to Support Black Lives Matter**

- In today’s climate, silence is violence—people need to speak up. But how you do that matters too.
- Messages around purpose are shifting right now. Everyone is struggling with what to say.
- How do we change the way we work while also moving the needle for clients and our industry?
- As we look at current events, we need to think about what we can no longer accept.



- Ally is not a noun—it's a verb.
  - The term ally, in relation to anti-sexist and anti-racist movements, is focused on listening, awareness and action.
  - Using your voice to advocate for an underrepresented community.
- Issues become systemic when we continue to ignore them and let them continue in silence
- Are you an ally or an accomplice?
- Three categories:
  - Actors
    - They don't disrupt the status quo or rock the boat
    - Do not challenge injustice or systemic racism
  - Allies
    - Disruptors and activists who stand with groups in solidarity
    - NOT an excuse to pat yourself on the back and feel entitled to being in black spaces
    - Constantly educating themselves
  - Accomplices
    - Take informed, coordinated actions and work closely with people of color.
    - Focused on dismantling systems of injustice, not just speaking against them.
    - Not motivated by personal guilt or shame
    - They build trust through consent and being accountability.
- Understanding your role
  - Allyship is a continuous journey—it's about progress, not perfection.
  - Being sympathetic to a cause is not enough. You have to do something about it.
  - Audiences crave transparency, trust and openness in a pandemic.
- Is your organization purpose-driven?
  - Needs to be built into the DNA of your organization.
- Representation and tokenism are NOT the same thing.

## Top Takeaways

1. Representation matters—you need diverse voices in the room to craft inclusive communications. As Vix put it, “nothing about us without us.”
2. We need to be proactive about what we do with DE&I. It’s not about just responding to events, its having an action plan for improvement and continuously talking to our stakeholders
3. D&I is a business imperative. We need it to be agile, innovative and to compete in the global marketplace.
4. Numbers are your friend when making your business case—they make it clear how important D&I and show us where we’re lacking, so show them to leadership.
5. Being intentional in our efforts is crucial—we have to look at all our communications with a critical lens and think about who is receiving our message.
6. In today’s media landscape, you can’t hide D&I problems—you need to acknowledge and correct them.
7. ERGs are a tremendous resource for employees and communicators. They help your org drive change, collect important feedback, tell great stories and build culture.
8. We all have unconscious biases—acknowledging them is important to being more inclusive communicators
9. Representation and tokenism are NOT the same thing. Feature people of color, have them in the room in meaningful, authentic ways.
10. DE&I is about more than words. It’s time to use our role as communicators to take action and push for change.