

The
Objectives and Challenges
 of
Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

by Keith Washington, contributing writer

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once quoted Benjamin E. Mays when he bellowed, **"He who starts behind in the great race of life must forever remain behind or run faster than the man in front. That is our dilemma."**

As our U.S. athletes and Olympic hopefuls prepare for the summer Olympics in Paris, I have been consuming my fair share of the competitions. It has been fascinating to watch our incredible athletes showcase years of work and dedication to their chosen events. It is also inspiring to hear the stories of so many who have sacrificed so much to make their dreams of reaching the Olympics a reality. Some of these stories include athletes who are doctors, lawyers, and corporate executives who have stepped away from their profession to train and compete. Others are delivery drivers, restaurant workers, and waiters. What I appreciate about the Olympics and its athletes is that these individuals, from various backgrounds and privileges, are competing within an environment where the rules and guidelines are clear and heavily enforced, ultimately leading to a fair and honest competition. The clock seen around the world is the objective discerner of who wins and who loses; it does not practice partiality nor preferences.

Most importantly, the eyes of the entire world can witness who wins — or more properly stated — whose demonstrated talents, work ethic, preparation, and performance are worthy of the gold, silver, and bronze medals. Consequently, at the end of the competition, when the athletes stand on the podium (or not), there are no questions about the results because the rules and guidelines of fairness have been clearly stated and blindly enforced to ensure the integrity of the competition and its outcomes.

This brings me to the topic at hand which is DEI. DEI is an abbreviation for diversity, equity, and inclusion, where the goal, generally speaking, is to design and foster an environment that allows all to compete professionally where the rules and guidelines of competition are clear and heavily enforced — akin to the Olympics — resulting in a fair landscape where every participant can perform at his or her full potential.

While the topic of DEI has attracted a significant amount of attention lately, this is not a new ideal. In retrospect, the same desired outcome was at the heart of the Civil Rights Movement during which the previously mentioned quote was made. This is especially significant in the workplace, as this is a key venue where families are built, and generational wealth is produced. Leaders in the past have recognized the critical importance of having a fair, even playing field where one's livelihood is earned. The unfortunate reality is that this is where racial discrimination continues to run rampant, further depriving millions of the opportunity to fully "capitalize" (in a capitalistic society) on their God-given talents and abilities, and intelligence. While countless individuals and organizations of goodwill recognize the value of what DEI efforts attempt to

deliver, by way of creating a fairer and more equitable environment, the fight is far from over. Unfortunately, those in positions of authority have waged a war against such efforts. They have chosen to focus on challenging the ideals of DEI rather than working to refine its approach.

If we further analyze this analogy, we should pay particular attention to the premise, **"He who gets behind in a race..."** The corporate world is only one of many areas in our society where we compete and vie to become and manifest the best version of our professional selves. The death of George Floyd and the international interests in the case highlighted the fact that a vast segment of our society belongs to the **"He"** in the premise of the quote referenced above. **"He"** includes those who have been (and continue to be) the victims of inequality within the spaces of economic, educational, and healthcare opportunities.

As a result, this segment of the American population and citizenry has found itself in an abject position of disadvantage. Writers Tracy Jan, Jena Gregor, and Meghan Hoyer, in their August 23, 2021 *Washington Post* article titled, *Corporate America's \$50 billion promise: A Post analysis of racial justice pledges after George Floyd's death reveals the limits of corporate power to effect change*, reported that corporate America agreed with this assessment. This recognition was substantiated and qualified with a collective financial commitment of approximately \$50 billion as a first step in "acknowledging it could no longer be silent in confronting systemic racism." It seemed that each week, company after company,

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from coast to coast, was making a public pledge to close the opportunity gap created over centuries of deprivation.

Unfortunately, just three short years after the publication of the Washington Post article, we are seeing a trend that is in stark contrast to the ostensible commitment we witnessed in 2021. Today, we are seeing a concerted effort to dismantle DEI and its “leveling the playing field” efforts towards equality across the country. Universities, corporations, and even our Supreme Court, have taken highly publicized steps to rule against such progress, essentially citing such efforts as “reverse discrimination.” Should this trend of resistance continue, those who find themselves “behind in the race of life,” will continue to remain behind unless “he” (or she) decides to run faster than the man (or woman) in front. How does one, in this case, “run faster” when the powers-that-be are making a challenge even more challenging?

Well, let’s first make it clear that the admonition to run faster is not a reference to one’s speed on the track. Rather it is, in this context, a clarion call to intentionally, deliberately, and strategically take the necessary steps to close the gap in the race of life. I would like to offer a few suggestions to all who feel a special affinity to the “He” population on how they can close the gap or “run faster” in the race of life:

- First, one must recognize, acknowledge, and appreciate his or her race of life in historical terms. Vigorously seek to learn your history and the history of the place where we are competing. Again, the effort to ban books and lessons designed to educate all about our national history attempts to deprive us of the opportunity to learn about the conditions that have created our country as it exists today. It is these lessons that can help one to better understand not only one’s position in this race, but the conditions that have contributed to his or her position. While we cannot rewrite history, with education, we can take appropriate steps not to repeat it.
- Secondly, seek to resolve the problem based on how it is defined. I firmly believe that it is difficult (if not impossible) to solve a problem that cannot be defined. Throughout my professional career, I have found myself working independently and collaboratively to perform what is called a “root cause analysis” in the quest to permanently solve problems. This is a specialized approach to 1) defining the problem, and 2) identifying its contributing factors(s) and condition(s). Once identified, 3) one can devise a robust plan to mitigate those circumstances that have contributed to the issue at hand.
- Third, make it your life’s practice to ALWAYS pursue EXCELLENCE in EVERYTHING you do. Dr. King also said that, “If it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Michaelangelo painted pictures, sweep streets like Beethoven composed music, sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry...Sweep streets so well that the hosts of heaven will have to pause and say, ‘here lived a GREAT street sweeper who swept his job well’...Sweep streets so well that the living, the dead, nor the unborn couldn’t do it any better.”
- Finally, embrace those who are advocating for your success, appreciate those who are investing in your progress, and most importantly, never stop “running” this race of life. There are many more people who support the ideals of DEI than those who oppose them. Let us not paint our society with one broad brush of resistance and indifference. Regardless of the negative obstacles before us, there is always a contrasting, positive side to it. We simply have to decide to find it.



Keith Washington is the Founder and CEO of Next Level Coaching, LLC dba Next Level Professional Development, LLC which is a business, career, and leadership coaching firm. Leveraging over 30 years of diverse corporate experiences, he provides career coaching, leadership development, and business consulting services to businesses, non-profits, sports teams, and colleges. Throughout his multi-industry career, and most recently as a supply chain executive, he has coached countless professionals and corporations - domestically and internationally. If you would like more information about this article or business assistance, please contact Keith Washington at nlcareercoach@gmail.com or visit www.nlcareercoach.com. PHOTO BY RED ANGLE PHOTOGRAPHY

In conclusion, while concerted steps are being taken by those in authority to dismantle DEI efforts across the country, remember that there is one power those in authority cannot diminish — your WILL to succeed! You, and you alone, will always have the power to decide to be great, despite the obstacles! Ecclesiastes 9:10 demands that “*Whatever thy hands find to do, do it with thy might...*” In other words, whatever you are determined to do, do it with every bit of strength you can muster. With that in mind, I would like to leave you with a final word of inspiration written by Douglas Malloch:

*IF YOU CAN’T BE a pine on the top of the hill,
Be a scrub in the valley — but be
The best little scrub by the side of the rill;
Be a bush if you can’t be a tree.*

*If you can’t be a bush be a bit of the grass,
And some highway happier make;
If you can’t be a muskie then just be a bass —
But the liveliest bass in the lake!*

*We can’t all be captains, we’ve got to be crew,
There’s something for all of us here,
There’s big work to do, and there’s lesser to do,
And the task you must do is the near.*

*If you can’t be a highway then just be a trail,
If you can’t be the sun, be a star;
It isn’t by size that you win, or you fail —
Be the best of whatever you are!*

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Going from bland to a mosaic of talent: How DEI can improve more than just your demographics

by Laura Wagenknecht, contributing writer

All right, folks, settle in because Laura’s got some business wisdom to share about this diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) thing. Forget the kumbaya and the fluffy stuff. This is about the greenbacks, honey!

Innovation: More Brains, More Benjamins

Have you ever heard of a little thing called “groupthink?” It’s when everyone’s so alike in a company that they start thinkin’ alike too. It’s a recipe for stale ideas and missed opportunities. But a diverse team? That’s a recipe for innovation that’ll have your profits soaring higher than my eyebrows after a good waxing.

Let me tell you about this one tech company I consulted for. A bunch of dudes, all from the same Ivy League

school, with the same golf clubs — the whole shebang. They were struggling to come up with new product ideas. We brought in some women and folks from different backgrounds and boom! Suddenly, they’re developing apps for new markets, products that nobody else thought of. Their value shot up faster than my blood pressure after a Trump tweet.

Talent Acquisition & Retention: Because a Bland Workforce is a Brand on Life Support

Talented people are like rare gems or honey, and they don’t grow on trees. If you’re only looking in one place, you’re missing out on a whole world of brilliance. Plus, nobody wants to work in a place that looks like a black-and-white movie. Snoozefest!

I once knew this healthcare company that was all about exclusivity — the pompous types who want a facelift the second they see a line or their eyebrows droop a tenth of a millimeter.

They hired a snooty receptionist and staff. Everything was uniform and boring. Their patients were few, and their sales were tanking. We shook things up, brought in a rainbow of talent, and suddenly, they became the hottest ticket in town. They even made plastic surgery cool again, especially the cool sculpting for the buttocks!

Market Expansion: Your Customers Aren’t All Cut from the Same Cookie Cutter

Here’s a little secret: the world is full of different kinds of people with different kinds of money. And if you

want a piece of that pie, you better cater to all those different tastes. You may have a target market, but it’s better when you can get them AND other customers, clients, and patients.

Take this food delivery app I invested in. At first, they were only targeting young, urban professionals. But, when they started offering diverse cuisines and marketing to different communities, their orders skyrocketed. It turns out that folks in the suburbs like sushi, too. Who knew!?

Risk Mitigation: DEI Training is Cheaper Than a Lawsuit (and a Whole Lot Less Messy)

Nobody wants to be known as a company with discriminatory practices. That’s bad for PR, bad for your employees, and bad for the community. It’s like having a roach infestation in your kitchen — nobody wants to eat there anymore.

I once worked with a company that was a hotbed of harassment and discrimination — I managed two employees who had sued the company. It was a toxic mess, costing the company a fortune in lawsuits and lost productivity. They finally got smart and invested in DEI training. It wasn’t a miracle cure, but it started to change the culture, and they avoided a whole lot of bad press.

The Bottom Line: DEI is a Smart Investment (Not Just for Your Soul, But for Your Stock Portfolio)

Look, I get it. Change can be scary. But in the business world, you’re dying if you’re not evolving. DEI isn’t just about being “nice,” it’s about being smart. It’s about opening doors to new ideas, markets, and talent. And that, my friends, is how you build a legacy that lasts longer than my career.

So, there you have it. Laura’s business advice, straight up. Now go out there and make some money — you’ve got this! TE



Award-winner and experienced business coach, consultant, and strategist Laura Wagenknecht knows how to put the pieces of businesses together. With more than five years as a business consultant and more than 30 years of professional experience, she has helped hundreds of businesses plan, start, and grow their businesses. She chose Mosaic Business Consulting as her company name because she loves diversity and believes all owners, entrepreneurs, and businesses are unique. She loves working with women and minority coaches, consultants, therapists, and healthcare providers the most, but also finds herself helping artists, retailers, and restaurants. She believes our diverse businesses provide a critical and beautiful contribution to the business community — and the world needs women and minority business owners to succeed. Visit Mosaic Business Consulting at <https://www.mosaicbusinessconsulting.com>. PHOTO PROVIDED