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Putting the 'I'
in DE&I

Putting the 'I' in DE&I

Overwhelmed by DE&I? You're not alone. Talent leaders are faced with hiring a diverse workforce in a talent-scarce market and in limited time. So, how are organizations managing successful DE&I initiatives in the current market?

On the Thursday 24th of February, TALiNT Partners, in partnership with global workforce solutions firm AMS, hosted an in-person, roundtable discussion with HR, DE&I and Talent Leaders in Atlanta. The event was held in the Oak Room at Del Frisco's Grille situated in the bustling neighborhood of Buckhead.

Judy Ellis, Senior Vice President and DE&I Advisory at AMS opened the discussion by asking the question: "How do you create buy-in to corporate DE&I initiatives in a way that everyone in the organization feels engaged and committed?"

She referenced a recent employee sentiment study to come out of a large employer where 25% of respondents viewed DE&I programs negatively. "Clearly, 75% were positive but such a sizeable minority is likely to impede meaningful progress; not least by making it simply too hard and too tiring for those within in the organization trying to drive change," added Judy.

Sherika Ekpo, Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer at Anaplan made the important observation that a big part of the problem is that whilst the vast majority of people want to do the right thing, DE&I can often feel like it's added on top of everything else and for a lot of executives in today's market (especially TA execs) it can all feel a bit overwhelming.

Sherika's advice was threefold: "Make sure DE&I is primarily focused on the benefits for the



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internal audience and not only the external one; if you have set aspirational goals, explain very clearly how you got there (both in terms of the actual objectives and the metrics) and, perhaps most importantly, continuously 'sell the problem' in other words, it's imperative to keep reminding people why DE&I is important as too often the outcome isn't seen in this context."

When it comes to DE&I strategies, communication is critical and while it doesn't have to be expensive it does take time so it's important to manage expectations and not expect quick wins.

FOCUS ON THE I AND NOT THE D

This is an increasingly common theme when it comes to how to land DE&I well and, whilst it is overly simplistic to say: 'Just do inclusion', there is a growing understanding that it is the key to long term success. Put directly, not only will DE&I fail if your diverse talent leaves, but it will also have been seen to fail, sending out a powerful message that says: 'diverse talent doesn't thrive here'.

We often find inspiration from unlikely sources: *"If everyone is thinking alike, then no one is thinking at all."*

Whilst there is some debate as to the provenance of the quote above and whether it came from Benjamin Franklin or General Patton, from an organization's perspective, it is as true now as it was then. This is where Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) have a pivotal role to

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play. Our group of delegates had a lively debate about ensuring ERGs remain business relevant – perhaps becoming Business Resource Groups – but all agreed that they are an incredibly important resource in developing new ideas, keeping leadership engaged and hopefully acting as an early warning system to identify issues.

But whether it's an ERG or BRG, tying DE&I programs to business goals is important to stop them being seen as purely performative and, again the point was made: 'Lead with the goal, not the metrics'.

But of course, tracking progress against DE&I goals is essential as proof points of organizational commitment and Liz Freedman, Global Head of Talent and DE&I at IHG Hotels & Resorts, gave a powerfully succinct response to how IHG determines which metrics are key for them on a global and market basis. "Inclusion and wellbeing are key measures across our global organization. However, representation in the leadership ranks varies across countries and functions, where demographic focus is likely to differ relative to gender, ethnicity, or nationality. There isn't a single global solution."

Having opened the conversation, Judy rounded up the discussion by again reminding us that whilst driving DE&I is hard and complex, the benefits that successful DE&I strategies bring to an organizations' culture, ability to attract talent and ultimately their long-term successes are huge.

"How do you create buy-in to corporate DE&I initiatives in a way that everyone in the organization feels engaged and committed?"

Judy Ellis, Senior Vice President and DE&I Advisory at AMS



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