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5 Ways CEOs Can Make Real Progress On Diversity And Inclusion

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By Tim Ryan, U.S. Chairman and senior partner, PwC

Just in the last two weeks, we saw Starbucks close all of its stores to implement anti-bias training in response to a racially charged incident and Disney cancel its hit sitcom “Roseanne” after the show’s star posted a racist tweet. It seems like now more than ever Fortune 500 companies and their leaders are being forced to confront diversity-related issues swiftly and publicly.

We should feel encouraged that CEOs and businesses are paying attention to their customers, employees, and the broader public when responding to these issues. And while we’ve seen companies step up to address problems when they happen – and many are doing this well – it’s not enough to solve Corporate America’s diversity problem.

Instead, we have to tackle the root issues by creating more diverse and inclusive workplaces and communities where everyone can succeed and thrive. When CEOs go to solve a big business problem, we invest the necessary time, money, and resources — and we don’t stop until it’s solved. So when it comes to advancing workplace diversity and inclusion, we’ll only succeed if we approach it in the same way.

Learning from how we as CEOs solve business problems, here are five actions we can take to address our diversity and inclusion (D&I) challenge:



advancing diversity and inclusion, even with the understanding that achieving these goals may take time. For example, in 2015, Marc Benioff made it [his personal mission to fix the gender pay gap at Salesforce](#) when an internal assessment found an overall pay disparity between women and men. A year later, Salesforce spent \$3 million to close the pay gap.

2. Use your influence in and out of your workplace: As leaders, we are used to driving positive change within our organizations and making an impact in our communities. We should do the same when it comes to tackling discrimination. Many companies are already doing this. For instance, Apple, Pfizer, Microsoft, Marriott, and other companies expressed [vocal opposition to anti-LGBT laws](#) in North Carolina, Indiana and Georgia. Other companies threatened to cancel their plans to invest and create jobs if these states didn't look to veto such discriminatory legislation.
3. Hold your company and those you do business with accountable to the values you represent: When companies look to do joint ventures or form partnerships, they team with organizations that complement and enhance their products and services. The same goes for addressing diversity and inclusion. Business leaders have to make a conscious decision to work with organizations that share their values and decline to do business with ones that don't. I for one make it a goal to bring up the issue of diversity and inclusion at every CEO meeting I have.
4. Understand that you are not the expert on diversity: Companies hire consultants for everything from strategy and change management to IT. As a CEO, you are expected to be an expert on your industry and business, but not necessarily on diversity and inclusion. And it's probably the case that most Fortune 500 CEOs haven't studied bias or experienced it in the way that many others have. But don't let your ignorance on the subject keep you from tackling this huge problem. Meet regularly with your chief diversity officer and seek feedback and advice from the minority and underrepresented groups within your organization. Bring in specialists, civil rights and racial justice experts, academics, and others in the field to help you have authentic dialogue and deliver on meaningful change. Starbucks did just that when it put together its program to educate employees about racial bias.
5. If you see something that's missing, go out and build it: America's companies have built



the same for diversity and inclusion. That's why I've devoted my time and resources to co-founding the [CEO Action for Diversity and Inclusion](#), the largest CEO-led initiative to advance workplace D&I (now with over 450 signatories).

Over its first year, we created a community for CEOs and chief diversity officers to share more than 500 D&I best practices and encouraged each other to host conversations with employees about race, sexual harassment, religion, and so on. It's also why CEO Action created the "Check Your Blind Spots" mobile tour, which has brought unconscious bias training to 5,000 people across the country.

Now in our second year, [we are raising the bar for ourselves](#) and setting an aggressive target of making 100 stops and training 1 million people at colleges, offices, festivals and public spaces. We're also releasing a free suite of diversity resources available to all businesses and hoping to grow our coalition to 1,000 CEOs. PwC alone is investing \$10 million in this effort.

These are just a few things CEOs can do to create more diverse and inclusive workplaces — but what needs to happen first is the acceptance that these issues are ours to solve. We can start by treating the lack of diversity and inclusion like we treat any other business problem — with same level of resources, effort and attention. We have a long way to go, but I am optimistic that if we keep pushing ourselves and our peers to do better, we will get there.

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