How to Create a Culture of Belonging

BY DEVRY UNIVERSITY

Truly feeling like you belong to a group goes beyond simply being a member. Whether it's through our families, hobbies or social groups, we feel an instinctual need to be a part of a community in some way. Feeling a sense of belonging to a community can have a positive impact on your wellbeing.

When you're exploring how to create a culture of belonging at work, it's important to identify exactly how creating this environment can benefit your team and encourage them to bring their best selves to work.

Benefits of Belonging

According to the Mayo Clinic[1], "When we feel we have support and are not alone, we are more resilient, often coping more effectively with difficult times in our lives." These positive benefits of belonging can also have a significant influence on your working life. Creating a culture of belonging can help you feel like your work aligns with your values and enable you to feel safe expressing yourself. That can positively affect your job performance while staving off negative outcomes like burnout or feelings of alienation.

What Does a Culture of Belonging Look Like?

Set the stage to cultivate a sense of belonging by encouraging everyone to contribute their ideas and perspectives. Being proactive about creating this culture within your team is just as important as facilitating their professional and personal development and can help everyone feel like they are on equal footing.

A culture of belonging focuses on helping you and your team

• **Feel respected** and recognized for who you are.

• **Create connections** with your colleagues and senior leaders.

• **Get what you need** from your peers and managers so you can complete your work and feel balance in your life.

• **Feel proud** of your company's values that align with your own purpose and vision.

How Do You Create a Culture of Belonging?

There are many ways that you can help create a culture of belonging, but the first step is to determine what works best for your team. Here are a few tips to guide you:

1. **Practice relating to your teammates.** Leaders who make an effort to relate to employees from different backgrounds actively create a culture of belonging and connection. It's also the manager's responsibility to ensure equity in pay, hiring practices and team and manager-employee relationships. Staying aware and invested in your team's goals can create genuine connections and developing a reputation for being a loyal manager goes a long way to create a psychologically safe space for everyone to thrive.

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2. **Put yourself in someone else's shoes.** This is an important skill in life and the workplace. Leading with empathy involves noticing how each person on your team participates on a general level, including their body language, voice and facial expressions. That way when they come to you with concerns you can be prepared to help them feel heard and understood, and they are more likely to feel like they are an important part of the group.

3. **Create safe spaces:** Creating a culture of belonging involves building psychologically safe relationships with your employees. This means helping your team members feel like they can approach you with honest concerns, questions or feedback that aren't met with retaliation or punishment.

How Do You Create a Sense of Belonging in a Virtual Environment?

Keeping your team engaged can happen through a variety of different virtual bonding activities. Try organizing a fitness challenge or planning virtual meetups that aren't work-related so team members can get to know one another. Encouraging teammates to join employee resource groups is another way to help them feel as though they belong to a community.

Make meetings interactive to manage remote workers and help them feel as though they're contributing to the group. Use polls, virtual white boards or other interactive methods to provide ways for teammates to give their opinions or weigh in on big decisions. Recognize contributions in virtual meetings to deepen and grow relationships and make team members feel more valued and essential.

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