As Diversity and Inclusion champions, we are often looked to for our expertise, experience and insights into some of the most provocative issues. As such, there seems no better time than the present to demonstrate the importance of challenging ourselves to dig deep and have the difficult and much needed discussions to heal, unite and to drive change.

The truth of the matter is that the issues of D&I are incredibly complex and intricate and none of us are “gurus or experts” on everything. What perhaps does set us apart is our ability to marry our experiences and knowledge with the ability to influence, be provocative and/or facilitate in a way that engages all perspectives and mindsets, and perhaps more importantly, question our own conventional thinking.

As we navigate the post 2016 election era, Diversity Best Practices offers you guidance and tips on how to approach challenging and sometimes controversial discussions.

What follows are some considerations as you prepare your discussions.

Understand and Determine the Role You Will Play

While not easy, our role as D&I leaders is to facilitate and encourage open dialogue. Our own values and perspectives may be challenged. They are deeply ingrained in who we are and in what we believe. But our awareness of our personal values, emotions and control of our reactions to those who oppose or think differently from us are absolutely essential in our role as champions.

There are different modes of leadership that we must display depending on our audience and our goals and objectives for these conversations.

Below are examples of the modes of leadership one may adopt in various situations.

**Facilitator:** Working with D&I councils, ERGs, leadership, to create open dialogue for understanding, engagement and problem solving. Remaining neutral and non-judgmental to create environments of openness and candor will provide a safe environment for dialogue that needs to happen. This role is perhaps the most challenging for the D&I professional. We must be aware of our “hot buttons,” even as we remain open to different perspectives.

**Influencer:** Working with C-Suite and business leaders to drive desired actions and behaviors. Understanding your audience’s decision making styles, what drives their behaviors will help you position yourself...speak their speak, walk their walk. As in any debate, take time to prepare by predicting the challenges and resistance you may face and how to respond.

**Provocateur:** Challenging “the way we’ve always done things.” Asking the necessary questions to raise the bar on challenges and D&I issues, demands that we push people to think very differently. This means we must think very differently about our own conventional wisdom. Play disruptor or devil’s advocate and encourage different viewpoints. Use “what if” and “what happens when...?” “what could we lose..?”, “How can we think about this differently?” Examples include talent management discussions (e.g. “what if we considered a lower level diverse high potential for that role? what is the greatest risk?”), workplace culture strategy (e.g. “how does our culture exclude some employees?”), engagement strategies (e.g. “what messages may potentially be contentious?”)
**Educator:** Training or leadership development sessions that call for teachable moments and awareness building. Prepare with facts and business case examples. Remain neutral and non-judgmental. Ensure focus on learning objectives.

**Inspirer:** Delivering town halls, calls to actions, spokesperson to external organizations. Being true and authentic builds the greatest level of credibility. Passion, commitment and energy often demonstrate themselves when speaking from the heart and mind.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Know your Audience</th>
<th>Know your Allies</th>
<th>Have clear objectives</th>
<th>Know facts and data</th>
<th>Listen for Understanding</th>
<th>Take risks</th>
<th>Don’t look to solve or obtain answers</th>
<th>Be comfortable with being uncomfortable</th>
<th>Be true and authentic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Influencer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provocateur</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educator</td>
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<td>Inspirer</td>
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</table>

Which role to be played will be dependent on your situation. Understanding our own perspectives, biases, values and roles in each situation is essential. The more aware we are of ourselves, the more effective we can be in shaping the dialogue going forward. Our role is critically important. Our stakeholders are looking to us. Our opportunity lies ahead.

**Sample Thought Process:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who is my audience?</th>
<th>What is/are the issue(s)?</th>
<th>What is the objective?</th>
<th>What role must I play?</th>
<th>Who are my allies?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C-Suite</td>
<td>Employees are struggling. Tension is thick and impacting productivity</td>
<td>Obtain buy-in from leadership to have privilege or race dialogue in the workplace. Convince leadership that dialogue belongs in the workplace</td>
<td>Influencer</td>
<td>ERG Leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-Suite</td>
<td>Silent resistance to D&amp;I (e.g. check the box culture with no authentic engagement or buy in)</td>
<td>Uncover issues so we can begin resolution. Engage resistors in dialogue and problem-solving</td>
<td>Facilitator</td>
<td>HR, ERGs, CEO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERG Leaders</td>
<td>ERGs Not making progress towards bottom line impact</td>
<td>Transition ERGs from networking groups to business impact groups</td>
<td>Provocateur</td>
<td>Business leaders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At Diversity Best Practices, we recommend organizations take this opportunity to engage leadership and champions in robust dialogue. Difficult times call for greater communication, reflection, and insights in order to move progress forward. As you prepare for these conversations, it’s important to consider rules of engagement:
1. Acknowledge change and emotions- allow participants the time to acknowledge the emotions that accompany these topics. Prepare your audience to both expect and allow themselves and others to express themselves. Encourage them to remain neutral and actively listen to others.

2. Meet your audience where they are. Don’t expect change or resolution, particularly in the beginning. Ask them to challenge themselves but be conscious of group dynamics to ensure you aren’t pushing too far.

3. Define and understand the impact to workplace, organization. The first step is acknowledging and understanding there is workplace impact. Identifying the impact is critical to begin your action planning.

4. Identify 2-3 priorities which are actionable and that the group can control. Be open to alternative viewpoints

As D&I champions and workplace employees, we have much to learn from our current environment. What follows are some sample discussion questions that you can use to ruminate on our traditional approach:

- How do we empathize with those who do not agree with us—and how can we increase our understanding of an opposing view and find a way to work together?
- Do we need to take a look at how we engage our workforce in the D&I effort? Has “the way we have done it” backfired?
- Do we engage or ignore the silent majority? What are the implications?
- What are the most important issues/fears that exist from each “side”?
- Do we/How do we define or call out issues such as “Black Lives Matter”/“Police Lives Matter” in the workplace? Are these topics necessary for creating understanding or do they cause more divide? Have our efforts caused more divide or engaged others?
- What are the implications and how do we bridge the gaps that divide us?
- How significant are the racist and sexist language that surfaced in this year’s election—and what role did explicit and implicit bias play? And importantly, what are workplace implications of each?
- Why are women and people of color perceived more negatively in the workplace when they surface issues of diversity and inclusion?
- What’s getting in the way of driving real change across our organizations?
- “Privilege”, “bias”, “diversity”...taboo/dirty words or advantageous? What do we do about them?

At Diversity Best Practices, we often are asked, “how do we convince our senior leaders to have these discussions in the workplace?” or “what is everyone else doing”.

Consider these points:

1) Employees are already having these conversations. The election, environment, social media information is on everyone’s minds. It’s everywhere and it can be consuming. Productivity, engagement, retention, safety and well-being can all be impacted.

2) Some organizations have made statements, most haven’t. Those that have made statements have differentiated themselves. In most businesses, we don’t look to our competition and industry to wait and see what others are doing first. We look to gain the competitive advantage through innovation and first-to-market strategies. D&I is a business imperative to most companies and should be treated similarly.

3) The war for talent is real and with the workforce reaching retirement age and growing with millennials, there are advantages to engaging our workforce in this meaningful dialogue. Millennials are socially driven and eager to make an impact. They are also motivated by organizations that demonstrate social consciousness.
4) Weigh the risks and benefits of having or not having dialogue/action. Consider that the actions of your organization don’t necessarily need to be big or brazen. Small actions and efforts go along way to start.

**Sample Actions and Additional Resources:**

Below we have provided some examples of what some organizations have done to address the post-election climate and other challenging times in this country and beyond. In addition, we have listed some resources that can help you get started no matter where you are in the process.

Sample letters from CEOs to their employees:

- [Apple’s letter to Employees](#)
- [JP Morgan Chase CEO’s Letter to Employees](#)
- [Starbuck’s CEO’s Letter to Employees](#)

Over the summer, DBP created a resource guide, *Turbulent Times Call for Bold Action*, to support leaders in facilitating difficult and necessary conversations. Many of the resources we provide in that guide continue to be relevant at this time. Last but not least, it is essential to take care of ourselves in order to do this work. To that end, one resource from the above guide we want to highlight is, *Finding Strength to Lead in Trying Times*. 
