

# Inclusion Starts with “I”

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In the past few years, we have seen more companies realizing that having a diverse workforce and an environment inclusive of different backgrounds, experiences, and ways of thinking is good for their bottom-line. In fact, recent [research from McKinsey & Company](#) shows that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 15% more likely to outperform those in the bottom quartile, while ethnically diverse companies are 35% more likely to outperform their less diverse competitors. Whatever your company's size and focus, the growing diversity and interconnectedness of our world has no doubt already impacted your business and will increasingly do so over time.

So, what role are you playing as an HR professional regarding diversity and inclusion (D&I) within your company? Do you feel like you are just too busy to tackle this area? Are you not getting leadership buy-in? Or are you just not sure where to start? In this three-part series, we at the [Lake Washington Human Resources Association \(LWHRA\)](#) are here to help with some tips for getting started. We will look at your role, tackle leadership support, and discuss gaining wide-spread organizational buy-in.

But let's start with YOU. Depending on your background and experience with D&I, this may be a field you are comfortable tackling. This area may also cause you a fair amount of uneasiness. One of the first things to realize is that whether or not you lead your organization's D&I efforts, ultimately, delving into this area will likely be a journey of learning for both you and your organization. A good part of diversity and inclusion work involves understanding unconscious biases and the way they influence our perceptions and actions. We all have them – yes, even us HR professionals. They are a natural part of the way our brain works to process massive quantities of information – by giving you short-cuts to navigate the world efficiently, though not always effectively. Addressing biases is key to advancing inclusion. Therefore, any work in this space has to start with the individual – that's you and me – to understand the way we view the world, the way we view others, and how this affects our work and our interactions.

For some terrific videos on bias, check out [PWC's video series on “Blind Spots”](#) and Accenture's video [#InclusionstartswithI](#) and for an even deeper dive into understanding your own blind spots, take one or more of the [Implicit Association Tests](#).

You may not feel comfortable doing some of this work, perhaps because you don't feel like you are an expert in understanding various communities – whether LGBTQ, different race/ethnic backgrounds, or military experience as examples, but I'll let you in on a little secret – none of us are. We know best and are most comfortable with what we ourselves have experienced. That is why we are most naturally drawn to people “like us” who share similar experiences and backgrounds. Stepping out of that comfort zone takes courage. But rest assured, as you start to build your D&I initiative, you will find people and resources along the way that will help you expand your knowledge, challenge your assumptions and biases, and think through how to help others step into the learning space with you. A great place to start is with [SHRM's Resources & Tools on Diversity and Inclusion](#) as well as [LWHRA's D&I Committee page](#).

Ultimately, you'll have to assess whether or not you will be the one leading this effort. If you are part of a smaller organization, it may naturally land on your shoulders. If that is the case – congratulations – you have just gotten the opportunity to build an environment that is even more welcoming, respectful, and inclusive of people from all walks of life. This can lead to greater employee engagement, more creativity and innovation, all of which can impact your company's bottom line in a positive way. If you are in a larger organization with more resources at your disposal, you may want to consider finding a consultant who specializes in D&I, hiring an expert, or looking to one or more of your leaders to act as a sponsor for your D&I work so you get it off the ground. Whichever path you choose, one of your first tasks – with or without assistance – is going to be getting leadership buy-in, a topic which we'll tackle in our next installment.