

# BUILDING LEADERS

## THE OPPORTUNITIES EMBEDDED IN THE PURSUIT OF EQUITY



Simply stated, some people are just ahead of their time. They understand complex problems at their core but struggle to convince those around them of a viable course of action, because the rest of us don't possess the necessary grounding to see what they see.

We would offer that Roosevelt Thomas fit this description. A Harvard-educated organizational psychologist, best-selling author and consultant, he is often referred to as “the father of diversity.” In an era where most equated the objective of a diversity initiative with a targeted number, he implored us to broaden our perspectives and embrace the inevitable challenges and inherent opportunities of effectively managing diversity. In his words:

*“Managing diversity is about engaging people, different and similar, for the benefit of an organization. It is about mobilizing those people to make quality decisions, in open acknowledgement of differences, and the tensions and complexities that are inevitable when those differences gather under one roof.”*

**WHEN WE FEEL LIKE WE BELONG, OUR GUARD GOES DOWN, AND OUR PARTICIPATION GOES UP.**

Few shine a light of updated understanding on that insight than

Pamay Bassey, chief learning officer for Kraft Heinz. In her words, “Diversity is a reality; inclusion is a practice; belonging is an outcome; equity is the goal.”

So, what is the role of the training function in the pursuit of equity? We believe it is primarily concentrated under the umbrellas of inclusion and belonging as follows:

### HIRING AND PROMOTION PRACTICE

Interviews are crystalized moments of truth in determining the presence and perception of equity. Fundamentally, that perception is governed by the makeup of the panel that has been assembled. Similar to the selection of a jury – if the diversity of the hiring or selection committee is not at least partially aligned with the diversity of the talent pool being considered – it is much easier to be skeptical of the integrity of the process being deployed.

Once identified, interview panels should not only be certified in behavioral interviewing techniques and best practices – intended to drive consistency of approach during discovery discussions – but should also receive in-depth, anti-bias training – intended to proactively address attributional effects stemming from interviewers' unconscious assumptions and beliefs. Further, the panel should conduct mock interviews and receive targeted feedback from experienced mentors and coaches on how questions are asked, how interactions

are facilitated and whether inclusive practice is prominently displayed.

### HELPING LEADERS LEARN HOW TO LISTEN

When we feel like we belong, our guard goes down, and our participation goes up. We think less about how, or if, our input will be received and more about how that input might help our teams succeed and our careers advance. And, make no mistake about it, that sense of unencumbered comfort is a product of leadership. Do those leaders listen? Because if they truly listen, we know they truly care.

Most of us find listening to others with whom we share common experience less challenging, as commonality can be an active accelerant in developing trust. Therefore, the challenge for leaders at all levels within an organization – and the training resources that support their efforts – is to learn how to listen to people that are different in a manner that ensures they know that you care!

If we can all learn to listen more effectively in transparent acknowledgement of the complexities and nuances that our differences bring, we can actively explore the abundant opportunities embedded in the pursuit and achievement of equity. 🌱

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