

January 25, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to enthusiastically recommend Organization at Its Best (OAIB), as well as its founder and CEO, Tawana Bhagwat. I am confident that other organizations would also benefit immensely from OAIB's expertise – perhaps in ways beyond what they initially expect.

My organization hired OAIB in July of 2020 to help us with leadership and senior manager coaching, staff training, facilitated listening and discussion sessions, organizational assessment, and organizational strategy and planning related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). OAIB remains a close partner and we hope to work with them for a long time to come.

Our experience so far has been extraordinary. OAIB has done all the things one would expect from DEI consultants: education on key concepts, helping staff to recognize their own implicit biases, concrete recommendations to build inclusive work cultures, advice on hiring and retention, creating safe spaces for facilitated conversations on sensitive and often very personal topics like race, religion, and gender identity. OAIB did all of these things extremely well, and with a very deft touch.

What truly has made OAIB truly stand out, however, is their ability to grasp underlying organizational dynamics and how they interact with DEI-related issues. An organization like the one I lead is not exempt from racism, sexism, biases, stereotypes, and other types of discrimination that plague our society. But as an organization that strives for social justice as part of its mission, people already believe strongly in core principles such as equity, fairness, and the benefits of diversity. There is no need to persuade them on this front – a fact that can inadvertently blind them to problems. OAIB helped my team see that even they, as people who have built their professional lives around these values, can behave in ways that perpetuate inequities or create less inclusive cultures. The OAIB team helped my team recognize how issues like race, gender identity, ethnicity, religion, and immigrant status may not always or even mainly be the primary root of certain organizational tensions or infractions, but they *interact* with other organizational dynamics (such as longstanding ways of doing things) that contribute to a less inclusive environment.

Another thing that made OAIB stand out was their ability to at once build trust with and challenge people at the senior management level. To address some of the issues referenced above, in a culture where people pride themselves on trying to do the right thing, it was necessary to make some (perhaps all!) senior managers feel uncomfortable and also take personal responsibility for our own less than admirable contributions. The fact that this occurred, that some people had very strong emotional reactions, and that every one of the OAIB coaches is still beloved in my organization is testament in itself.

Though we are still on a journey, I can point to real changes in our organization as a result of OAIB's partnership and expert advice. Any other mission-driven organization that wants to create a truly inclusive culture, not just talk about it, will also be well served by OAIB's partnership.

Sincerely,



Kristin M. Lord
President and CEO