



# Leveraging the Power & Promise of Workplace Equity

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# How can your organization be at its best?



We created this guide to help business and HR leaders understand that workplace equity is not something to be feared but embraced, and that while it is difficult to change organizations and individuals, it is possible.

We know because this is what we do. When harnessed, equity has the power to make teams more resilient, more connected, more innovative, and more productive.

When people bring their best, *authentic* selves to work, they have higher energy, commitment, and passion.

At OAIB, we don't view Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging as a separate "initiative," but a way of operating. A culture of belonging.

# ———— *In this guide* ————



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## — *What is workplace equity?* —

Equity in the workplace means more than everyone receiving respectful and dignified treatment.

It also means individuals have equal access to opportunities.

Equity exists when all individuals are given what **THEY** need to thrive, so the playing field is leveled.



## Shouldn't I just treat everyone the same?

While related concepts, and often used interchangeably, equity is not the same thing as equality. Understanding this difference is crucial to providing individuals the necessary tools they need to thrive and contribute.

In an “equal” workplace, employees will generally be treated all the same, given the same desk or office spaces, given the same support and resources, the same amount of coaching from their supervisors, etc. This model presumes everyone is the same, and while people do share many similarities, we each bring our own identity as well as a personal and cultural history to work.

Equity, on the other hand, strives to achieve the best possible contributions from each individual employee, by giving individuals what they each need to thrive. It's a more difficult route, requiring organizations understand each person to be an individual and adjust resources, support, and treatment accordingly.



# Benefits of equity in the workplace



## *Encourages Achievement*

Believing that rewards come from effort and contribution (not privilege), employees with ability and drive will strive to excel.



## *Increases Employee Retention*

Employees who believe they can have a bright future with a company will want to stay and participate.



## *Attracts Top Talent*

People who have a lot to offer want to be compensated fairly, without worrying about hidden agendas that lead to preferential treatment for a chosen few.



## *Broadens Perspectives*

Equity encourages diversity, which means more experience and perspectives for analyzing, problem solving, and innovating.



## *Improves Morale*

When employees feel that everyone is doing their part, no group feels like they have to carry the burden of explaining their differences.



## *Enriches Bottom Line*

A culture that attracts, welcomes, and retains top talent can make a company more competitive and profitable.





# 6 *ways* to create and leverage workplace equity

## 1. Get Real.

Be honest with yourself about where your organization is.

Do you know what marginalized employees *really* think?

Do you have hard data on how well your employee mix and leadership reflects the communities you serve and goals you want to achieve?

Many of OAIB's clients don't know what to focus on because they don't know where they are.





When it comes to workplace culture, there is a large gap between what leaders think is going on and what employees say is happening on the ground.

**68%**

of leaders think they  
create empowering  
environments.

**36%**

of employees agree.



## *2. Make space for everyone to tell their story.*

Equitable work environments allow people to be different, to be themselves.

When employees don't have to work at hiding or explaining, they can bring their best, authentic selves to work.

This starts with leadership valuing everyone's experiences, expertise, talents, and perspectives, which they have gained and lived, rather than saying "I don't see color."



*Two-thirds* of employees feel comfortable reporting sensitive issues, such as a concern about their mental health or the behavior of a senior colleague.

**Leaders believe this is 15% higher.**



### 3. Level the playing field.



If *diversity* asks “Who is in the room?” then *equity* asks “Who is trying to get into the room, but can’t?”

Individuals from different ages, ethnic backgrounds, countries of origin, physical abilities (or disabilities), sexual orientations, or genders, each face unique challenges to contributing to teams, advancing in the organization, and growing personally, equitable workplaces.



—— *In equitable cultures, everyone rises.* ——

**2x**

Men are twice as likely  
to reach senior  
manager and director  
levels.

**4x**

Women are four times  
more likely to reach  
senior manager and  
director levels.



## 4. Be transparent.



Equity means leaders are transparent about cause and effect.

Share diversity survey results and progress metrics. Be open about challenges and opportunities.

Publicizing targets and demonstrating accountability helps everyone know what to expect, how to advance, and the consequences and rewards for demonstrating equitable behavior.



## *5. Stop compartmentalizing.*

Do you have to become a totally different person when you leave home for work? Many employees do.

When people are able to be their authentic selves at work, they are more creative, energetic, and able to contribute.

They can't do this when pressured to achieve an unattainable perfection that leaves no room for mistakes or growth.

A culture of “professionalism” is often used as a form of hazing or a weapon against people of color, especially when leaders and managers rely on saying things like: “that’s the way we do it here” or “our way is the right way.”



*Studies have shown that feeling more included  
boosts productivity.*





## *6. Brag about your progress and impact*

As you create a more equitable workplace, share your successes!

Staff can tell their stories to leaders and peers. Human resource departments can share their statistics as trends.

By sharing your lessons learned with your industry, or creating forums to compare notes, your organization can build a name for itself as a destination workplace.



# — Equity Leadership —

*Declare*

that building a more  
inclusive culture is an  
organizational  
priority.

*Recognize*

change as a  
personal goal.

*Reward*

people for building a  
more equitable  
culture.





## —— *A vision of equitable workplaces* ——

We envision work cultures where everyone feels a sense of belonging regardless of differences.

Where people can have brave conversations about religion, race, and politics and it's no longer taboo.

Where policies, procedures, practices, and behavior (at all levels) are in alignment with the mission and vision of the company.



## — Other Resources —

- [The Racial Equity Bootcamp](#), by OAIB
- [White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism](#), by Robin DiAngelo
- [Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents](#), by Isabel Wilkerson
- [Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race](#), by Beverly Daniel Tatum
- [Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women That a Movement Forgot](#), by Mikki Kendall
- [The Emperor Has No Clothes: Teaching About Race And Racism To People Who Don't Want To Know \(Educational Leadership for Social Justice\)](#), by Tema Okun
- [Catherine Pugh's Blog on Medium.com](#)





## ——— *About Organization At Its Best, Inc.* ———

OAIB a full-service Human Resource and Executive Consulting firm helping private, non-profit, and public sector organizations create committed, effective, and sustainable cultures distinguished by a deep sense of belonging.



Learn to become  
intentional and freed from old,  
limiting ways of thinking.



Upskill your leadership  
to embrace change  
and challenge.



Create a culture where  
everyone can bring their  
authentic selves to work.

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