

Staff Development Award Report

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I want to thank you for approving my application for the award. I have been in human resources for over 25 years and hold two certifications. Attending conferences such as this allows me to receive the continuing education that I need to maintain my certifications.

During the conference, I learned a lot about Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB). People have been talking about Diversity for a while now. Then people started to re-evaluate that and said that we need Equity, as opposed to Equality. That then turned into Inclusion. Today, we are finally talking more about Belonging. That is the true goal. Do our staff, faculty, students, etc. feel like they belong?

Belonging is the feeling of being part of something and mattering to others; it is created through inclusion which consists of intentional acts. Belonging is a fundamental need and is vital to performance and well-being. In Maslow's Hierarchy, Belonging is only preceded by Physiological Needs and Safety Needs. The Benefits of Belonging for employers are a 75% decrease in employee sick days, 56% increase in job performance and 50% reduction in turnover risk.

Thinking back over DEIB, we tend to focus on differences such as race, age, gender. We do our best to make sure that people with those differences feel heard and that they belong. But another area that we truly need to consider is mental health. In a lot of instances, we don't know what a person may be going through mentally and emotionally. Yet, how many times have we said, "Are you Nuts?" or "Are you mental?" when we thought an idea was off the wall? Even if that person wasn't going through something, how do you think someone that is depressed or has anxiety attacks or has a mental illness would feel if they overheard you saying that? Would they feel comfortable coming to you for help? Did we create a sense of belonging for them? Over the last few years, the mental health of all employees has gone up and down. Each of us is adapting and reacting to the changes being thrown at us differently and may or may not be dealing with the world in which we find ourselves.

An important part of belonging is listening. Many of us hear the words and do not truly listen. Usually, we are listening to respond rather than listening to understand. We need to be more active listeners. We can do this by reflecting on the feelings expressed and summarizing what we are hearing. We should also pay attention to nonverbal cues and

maintain good eye contact. This shows that we truly care about what they are saying and appreciate that they are sharing with us. Even if we don't have the answers, just by listening, we are helping that person feel they belong.

All in all, the conference truly enforced to me that employees need to feel that they belong. Asking them questions, encouraging, but not insisting on their participation, and listening to their perspective and world view will help to work toward this and hopefully improve department relations as well as mental health.