

THE IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Mobile Area Chamber President and CEO **Bill Sisson** shares his viewpoint on why diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in the workforce are so important for businesses as well as the Chamber's DEI statement to serve as encouragement for creating your own organization's guiding statement.



During the last several years, our Mobile Area Chamber leadership has been committed to expanding our diversity and inclusion efforts to address equity.

To help define these terms, I am fond of another example shared with us through the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives. "Diversity

means that everyone gets invited to the party. Equity means that everyone can contribute to the playlist. Inclusion means that everyone can dance."

In the following pages, you'll find the Chamber's updated diversity, equity and inclusion statement, consisting of nine points passed by our board of directors last summer, and how it has been woven into our current strategic plan. In his column, Darrell Randle, the Chamber's vice president of small business development, outlines our latest efforts, building on more than two decades of initiatives designed to reach out to our diverse areas of membership, including the Eagle Awards. We offer why this type of program matters and potential action items your organization can take.

Speaking for our organization, I can say this is an important mindset that we believe is not only the right thing to do, but also is good for business and good for our community.



MOBILE AREA CHAMBER DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION STATEMENT

The Mobile Area Chamber's governing board of directors updated the organization's formal commitment to diversity and inclusion, adding equity in June 2020.

The Chamber is committed to being an inclusive organization. We strive to have an environment within our organization that fosters and encourages diversity, reflective of the makeup of our community. We believe diversity of thought enriches discussion, results in better judgment and enhances the growth and development of our organization and our community as well.

To accomplish this, the Chamber commits to:

- Annually review the makeup of our board of directors with a special emphasis on diversity.
- Encourage diversity on our committees and task forces.
- Recruit and nurture new leadership roles for our organization from among women and minorities.
- Work to attract more diversity in our membership.
- Ensure diversity is reflected in the makeup of our staff.
- Provide in-service training for staff on valuing diversity and sensitivity in the workplace.
- Ensure our purchasing procedures are open and available to all members.
- Encourage staff participation in minority affairs, events and activities.
- Support our members, customers and suppliers in their efforts to encourage diversity within their companies or organizations.

CHAMBER TO LAUNCH NEW ONLINE DEI DIRECTORY

The Mobile Area Chamber is moving forward with plans to introduce an all new online diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) directory featuring local minority-owned businesses. This modern and comprehensive directory will be a one-stop shop for those looking to do business with minority business enterprises (MBEs). The DEI directory will feature business resources, training and contracting opportunities for local MBEs.

In order to accomplish this and to insure the DEI directory is done to the highest standard, the Chamber is partnering with Qwally, a software and technology development firm specializing in creating online platforms to help communities improve access to information, technology, program compliance and contracting opportunities.

“We first learned about Qwally through the City of Mobile’s Startups in Technology program,” said **Darrell Randle**, the

Chamber’s vice president for small business development. “The company impressed me with their attention to detail, passion for helping entrepreneurs and their willingness to listen and implement our suggestions. I felt sure they could also expand on the work they performed for the city and build a sustainable digital platform for our minority-owned businesses.”

The Chamber’s five major goals in developing the DEI directory are: it should be free; easy to use and maintain; list contracting opportunities; promote MBEs; and be a useful resource to MBE advocates.

The details on how to sign up for and maintain online listings will be available by December 2021 with the DEI directory going live in January 2022.

For additional information, contact Danette Richards at 251.431.8652 or drichards@mobilechamber.com.



THE CHAMBER'S DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION PROGRAM LEADS THE WAY

by Darrell Randle, Vice President Small Business Development, Mobile Area Chamber

I have been with the Chamber for more than 17 years, and initiatives dedicated to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) have always been a part of the Chamber's programming or DNA. As Chamber President and CEO Bill Sisson, says, "DEI has to be woven into every aspect of the Chamber."

But something changed last year. Local CEOs, corporate and business leaders wanted to know more about our initiatives, and many of them offered their assistance. It was an unsolicited promise to make our community better that re-energized my efforts to make Mobile's DEI programs a model for the rest of the nation. The pandemic slowed our timeline a bit, but slowing down the process gave us time to evaluate and improve our DEI programs.

In 2020, the Chamber enlisted key volunteers to form a Strategic Thought Team to develop a three-year strategic plan for the Mobile Bay area. They were asked to determine community priorities in their assigned areas of focus, establish measurable goals and find available resources. Next, they identified short-term and long-term goals for what programs and initiatives they would like to see established or enhanced in the next three years.

Priorities were ranked, with the top three added to the Chamber's plan of action. At the top of the list was "A Conversation Regarding Diversity, Equity and Inclusion," so we enlisted the Eddie Hill Consulting Group of Birmingham and Interise, a nationally known company that specializes in empowering communities of color, to facilitate those meetings.

In these meetings, the CEOs and corporate and business leaders were given the opportunity to do what they do best: solve problems and determine whether our community is inclusive and how we can work to make it better.

The DEI conversation was developed into a five-part virtual training/listening session with the CEOs and business leaders. Their task was to focus on creating jobs in the Mobile Bay region with an emphasis on DEI. In other words, they were to build a business case for supplier diversity so that all will prosper as the region grows.

The five-session program overview:

- **Session 1:** Understanding the Patterns of Economic Exclusion
- **Session 2:** Applying Systems Thinking to Economic Inclusion
- **Session 3:** Leading Change and Action for Economic Inclusion in Your Organization – Part One
- **Session 4:** Adding the Perspective of MWBEs
- **Session 5:** Leading Change and Action for Economic Inclusion in your Organization – Part Two

The Chamber's future DEI plans include:

- Providing business-to-business matchmaker events to introduce procurement agents from large companies to Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) owners.
- Developing an online minority business directory for the Mobile Bay region, giving large corporations the ability to quickly locate minority- and women-owned businesses.
- Advertising and promoting a minority-owned member company using the Chamber's social media channels every two weeks. Members are selected during a social media event to push traffic to the Chamber's social media sites.

I can honestly say that we lead the state in DEI programming. Our local business leaders have stepped up to be proactive and have a positive impact in communities of color. It reaffirms something we always knew: we are stronger together.

ABOUT THE EXPERT

Darrell Randle is the vice president of small business development for the Mobile Area Chamber. In this role, he oversees the Chamber's efforts in developing small and minority-owned businesses. In addition, the department serves as a starting point for business owners needing to start, manage or grow their business. Randle has worked in this position for 17 years – having previously been a small business owner himself.

To contact Randle, call 251.431.8615 or drandle@mobilechamber.com.



WHY DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION MATTER



The words “diversity, equity and inclusion” have almost become a part of our vernacular, but what do they really mean? Why equity and not equality?

To start, equity is fair treatment and equality is equal treatment. Giving someone equal treatment may not always be equitable.

Michelle Bogan, founder and CEO of Equity at Work, writes that if “you start from a place of disadvantage and are then treated equally as a person of advantage, you perpetuate and ultimately grow the gaps between the two. You need equitable measures first to close the gap and get everyone to a level playing field.”

The illustration shows the difference between equality and equity. When all children are given equal compensation, not all receive the proper benefit of being able to see over the fence. But when an equitable solution arises and different boxes are used, the children are given an equitable chance to all see over the fence.

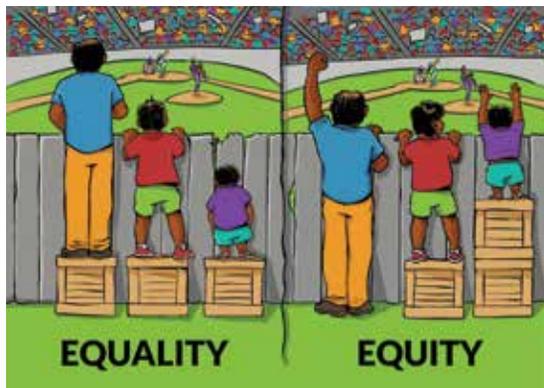
“Equity is necessary to change systemic and institutionalized disparities within organizations,” said **Naomi Mercer**, senior vice president of diversity, equity and inclusion with American Bankers Association.

Diversity is the presence and representation of difference related to identity in an organization or group. Whether visible or not, many identities add uniqueness to our perspectives and world experiences.

Diversity is about representation and identity factors. Some are inherent and we cannot change them, but others could be a result of a choice or something imposed upon us.

“Inclusion is the act of creating environments and cultures of belonging in which any individual or group with different identities

can feel welcome, respected, supported and valued to fully participate,” said Bogan. “Equity and inclusion are processes. When those processes are executed with intention, diversity is the outcome.”



“**Equity and inclusion are processes. When those processes are executed with intention, diversity is the outcome.**”

Michelle Bogan, founder and CEO, Equity at Work



OWN MORE OF YOUR BUSINESS

WITH AN OWNER-OCCUPIED REAL ESTATE LOAN

Take more control of your operations. Eliminate the uncertainty of leasing or renting. Purchase an ideal location for your business or optimize your existing property. With an Owner-Occupied Real Estate Loan, you can gain the flexibility of leveraging your equity to expand or remodel as your business grows.



Contact a BancorpSouth Relationship Manager at a branch near you to help customize a loan to fit your business needs.

[BancorpSouth.com/OORE](https://www.BancorpSouth.com/OORE)

©2021 BancorpSouth. All Rights Reserved. Member FDIC
This is not a commitment to lend. Product and availability subject to change.



UNCONSCIOUS BIAS IN THE WORKPLACE

People make decisions every day and, according to Forbes, the human brain can process 11 million pieces of information per second unconsciously. So, what do these unconscious decisions have to do with the workplace?

Unconscious bias is one form of unseen diversity in people. By definition, unconscious bias refers to the associations made between different qualities and social categories such as race, gender or disability and judgments made without conscious awareness.

According to an article by the Allegis Group, an international talent management firm, these stereotypes or “gut feeling” responses can be a major contributor to a lack of workplace diversity.

The article states that every time we unconsciously make a decision, our background, life experiences and cultural values will impact our reasoning. In the workplace this can have a negative impact on recruitment decisions, slow down employee development, impair diversity and drive up attrition.

Recognizing this bias is an important part of any company’s DEI efforts, as it can affect organizations by introducing unintentional discrimination and result in poor decision-making. Such behavior can impact recruiting, mentorship and promotions.

So how does a company overcome unconscious bias? A good place to start is by identifying and naming the types of biases that can occur and bringing this type of behavior to a conscious level.

Built In, an online community for startups and tech companies, identified 16 unconscious biases to consider and to be aware of if you are making them.



AFFINITY BIAS

Affinity bias, also known as similarity bias, is the tendency people have to connect with others who share similar interests, experiences and backgrounds.

CONFIRMATION BIAS

Confirmation bias is the inclination to draw conclusions about a situation or person based on your personal desires, beliefs and prejudices rather than on unbiased merit.

ATTRIBUTION BIAS

Attribution bias is a phenomenon where you try to make sense of or judge a person’s behavior based on prior observations and interactions you’ve had with that individual that make up your perception of them.

CONFORMITY BIAS

Conformity bias is the tendency people have to act similar to the people around them regardless of their own personal beliefs or idiosyncrasies — also known as peer pressure.

THE HALO EFFECT

The halo effect is the tendency people have to place another person on a pedestal after learning something impressive about them.

THE HORNS EFFECT

The horns effect is the tendency people have to view another person negatively after learning something unpleasant or negative about them.

THE CONTRAST EFFECT

The contrast effect is when you compare two or more things that you have come into contact with — either simultaneously or one after another — causing you to exaggerate the performance of one in contrast to the other.

GENDER BIAS

Gender bias is the tendency to prefer one gender over another gender.

AGEISM

Ageism in the workplace is the tendency to have negative feelings about another person based on their age.

NAME BIAS

Name bias is the tendency people have to judge and prefer people with certain types of names — typically names that are of Anglo origin.



A way to combat unconscious bias in the workplace would be to include employees with projects that link the organization to the community and help create a positive image of certain groups.

BEAUTY BIAS

Beauty bias is a social behavior where people believe that attractive people are more successful, competent and qualified.

HEIGHT BIAS

Height bias or heightism is the tendency to judge a person who is significantly shorter or taller than the socially-accepted human height.

ANCHOR BIAS

Anchor bias or expectation anchor bias is when someone holds onto an initial, singular piece of information to make decisions.

NONVERBAL BIAS

Nonverbal bias is analyzing nonverbal communication attributes such as body language and letting it affect a decision or opinion.

AUTHORITY BIAS

Authority bias refers to when an idea or opinion is given more attention or thought to be more accurate because it was provided by an authority figure.

OVERCONFIDENCE BIAS

Overconfidence bias refers to a person's tendency to be more confident in their capabilities than they should be.

Recognizing unconscious bias can be in our perception of people and how we perceive reality; our attitude towards certain people; how we act towards certain people and who we pay attention to and who we avoid; how much we listen to certain people; and how much or how little we comfort people in certain situations.

In addition to recognizing unconscious biases, employee training in a careful and open manner may be considered to acknowledge some of these biases exists, and create an environment where employees may discuss these biases without judgment or being ostracized.

To avoid potential discriminatory behavior, awareness of unconscious bias is important to show or have employees realize this type of thinking is unfair. These are thoughts we have the ability to control.



The DEI articles in this issue were written with input from Dr. Gia Wiggins, Ph.D., SPHR, SHRM-SCP

Wiggins is a career human resources professional. A native of Mobile, she received a bachelor's degree in psychology and sociology from

Grambling State University. After working as a human resources manager for 16 years, she completed a master's in business administration from California State University. She received a doctorate of business administration at the University of South Alabama with a concentration in management. She currently serves as an adjunct instructor with the University of South Alabama and the University of Mobile teaching human resources management, intro to business and business communications. She also holds (SPHR) Senior Professional Human Resources and (SHRM-SCP) Society of Human Resources Management – Senior Certified Professional certifications.

In 2015, Wiggins founded Morale Resource LLC, a human resources consulting firm that places special emphasis on developing employee engagement programs and activities.

HOW TO PROMOTE DEI IN YOUR WORKPLACE

Creating a more diverse and inclusive workplace starts at the top but should include considerations and input from your employees. Whatever your company does to promote diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in your workplace, make sure to take all considerations into account, especially those of each underrepresented group.

According to the U.S. Chamber Foundation, the U.S. Census predicts that millennials will make up 75 percent of the workplace by 2025. And more importantly, studies show that this generation of workers is willing to change jobs when organizations fail to make DEI a priority.

To get started, TalentLyft recently released a blog about workplace diversity and ways to make your company more inclusive.

1. Update your employee handbook.

By adding a statement about DEI in your employee handbook, you are showing your employees that DEI is one of your company values. Read the Chamber's DEI statement on page 27 as an example. But don't write one unless you are intentional on what steps you are willing to take within your organization. Initiatives toward DEI should come first, then the statement in the handbook.

2. Establish mentorships for underrepresented groups.

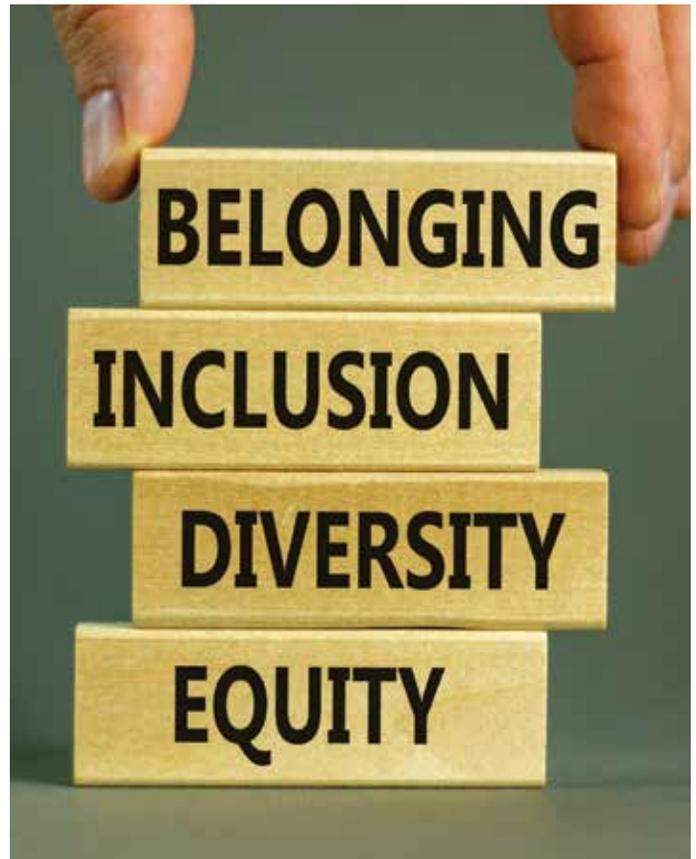
Mentorship programs have proved time and again to be an effective tool for small business owners and professionals. Becoming a mentor or promoting mentorships within your company can help boost underrepresented groups and help with their career progressions. Make sure all programs are open for everyone to join.

3. Issue a statement about DEI from the CEO.

When adding your DEI statement to your handbook, make sure to include the message from your CEO to your current staff. He or she sets the example for the company and should embrace workplace DEI first.

4. Use inclusive language.

According to Buffer's Guide to Inclusive Language for Startups and Tech, we should all try "to change deeply embedded habits. To consider the implications of words and phrases that



have long gone unchallenged. To dig deep into empathy and imagine an experience not our own."

Some recommended changes would be to put people first. Instead of saying "blind man" say "a man who is blind." Keeping the individual first shows we are much more than our descriptions. Other suggestions include avoiding idioms, jargons and acronyms and avoiding phrases that suggest victimhood.

5. Start or join a resource group.

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) help bring people together to share different perspectives, ideas and experiences and are usually formed around a shared social identity. This identity could be gender, ethnicity or life stage, such as parenthood. Again, make sure all programs and groups are open for everyone to join.

6. Hire for diversity.

“Workplace diversity starts with hiring,” said **Anja Zojceska** with TalentLyft. Real change can come from hiring diverse candidates through implementing blind resume screenings and highlighting diversity and equal employment in your job ads. Be sure to pay attention to hiring for diversity of experience and making a positive action of finding a candidate of diversity.

7. Use social media to promote diversity.

Make sure to share all your company’s DEI content on social media through posts, videos and blogs. Be respectful in your posts and make sure to use a tone that promotes equity.

8. Celebrate diverse holidays.

Besides the usually celebrated holiday parties, why not think about different religious and non-religious holidays to celebrate. Remember to celebrate days that encourage diversity such as gay pride, international women’s day or International Day of People with Disabilities.

Other examples include, National Freedom Day in February, which celebrates the signing of the 13th Amendment that abolished slavery in 1865; and the Lantern Festival celebrates the first significant feast after the Chinese New Year. In April, World Autism Awareness Day to raise public awareness of autism; and in May, World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development, a day set aside by the United Nations as an opportunity to deepen our understanding of the values of cultural diversity and to learn to live together in harmony.

Brenda Pak, cofounder and CEO of BackPac, a multifaceted social activist platform, wrote how COVID-19 disproportionately impacted diverse groups and “highlighted the responsibilities needed to focus more intently on people and source diverse talent as the economy recovers.”

Pak concluded by stating “we cannot allow diversity and inclusion to be merely buzzwords around the corporate ecosystem. We need lasting change, and market leaders have the ability and resources to bring real results in diversity leadership and inclusion efforts.”

While there is no one solution or one-size-fits-all diverse workplace program, start with your employees and go from there. What do they want? What do they expect? This outlook will not only make your employees feel involved in your decision but also included and that can help your company’s bottom line.

Make sure to recognize what your employees actually want.

When introducing DEI into your company, gather feedback from your employees to include them in your company’s DEI initiatives.

Boston Consulting Group conducted a study of 16,000 employees from across the world to find out what diversity initiatives they wanted. They found that different groups preferred different type sof workplace and initiatives.

Female Employees - wanted visible role models and flexible work programs for family leave.

Employees of Color - emphasized diverse recruiting with blind resume screenings and diverse interview panels.

LGBTQ Employees - wanted collaboration with LGBTQ-focused organizations and their company.



Phoenix Restoration Services

Full Service Disaster Solutions

251.725.1779 phoenixrest.com

We are a locally-owned, full-service, commercial restoration company, specializing in mitigation, cleaning, contents and reconstruction services.

- 24 Hour Emergency Response
- Fire & Water Damage Clean-up and Repair
- Mold Remediation and Asbestos Abatement
- Contents Cleaning and Storage
- Commercial Reconstruction



General Contractors License #47231 • IICRC Certified Firm - Fire, Water & Mold
ADEM Asbestos Abatement License • Alabama Homebuilders License