



Diversity, Equity & INCLUSION



By Dr. Nancy Koury King
President, Senior Options

This article is the first in a series on Diversity & Inclusion.

In this article, I interview Marisa Garverick-Herrera, a DEI specialist.

I don't know about you, but heightened coverage of escalating unrest, outloud bigotry, and racial and gender disparity has caused me to think more deeply about what I could do to make things better.

Admittedly, I am not an expert on diversity and inclusion. I am probably like many of you, a leader who wants to do better, who wants to be sensitive to everyone we serve, and those who serve them. And perhaps like you, I didn't know where to start. Admittedly, I was afraid to step in it or say the wrong thing. But I still felt compelled to do something.

I wanted to learn how I could be a more effective and inclusive leader in this space. To do this, I interviewed experts on diversity, equity, and inclusion (more on these terms later) to gain a foundation of the goals and the kind of work they are doing to make sure organizations' marginalized clients and employees are treated fairly. I also interviewed several LeadingAge member leaders whose organizations made conscious efforts to acknowledge and remedy some of the effects of racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of prejudice.

As leaders in our organization, there are many reasons to be engaged in diversity, equity, and inclusion. Not only is it the right thing to do, but having competency about the issues that affect different groups can help employee morale and retention, create better functioning teams and prepare the organization for the growing diversity of future residents and employees. I encourage you to use these stories and interviews as a guide to bringing these crucial elements to your workplace and team.



Self Reflection and Role of Leadership



Marisa Garverick-Herrera
Founder, Hasta La Equity LLC

is the owner and founder of Hasta La Equity LLC. This firm specializes in helping organizations, teams, and individuals better understand and improve cultural consciousness, diversity, and inclusion to move towards more equitable change.

She underscores that now is the time for us to have conversations about diversity and inclusion. “We are in a great reckoning of changes. And we know racism has always existed, but there is a more public movement, an eruption of consciousness of a large group of people.”

She began our conversation by offering a framework for how to approach differences and commonalities. “We want to be in a healthy balance of how we approach commonalities and differences and not assign value – not overemphasize commonalities, because that can lead to conformity and assimilation, and we want not to assign value to difference because that can lead to fragmentation or conflict. If we are in a healthy balance of commonality and difference, then we’ll be more focused and innovative, and more authentically engaged.”

As part of my journey, Marisa offered me the opportunity to take the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), a widely used and validated assessment tool. The IDI goal is to understand your journey and how well you are navigating cultural differences and commonalities in cultural competence. The assessment helps you know where you are on the intercultural development continuum. For me, my aspirations for cultural competence scored much higher than my actual practice. I have a long way to go, but I am all in. Once you complete the assessment and review it with Marisa, you can study the results and develop an action plan for growth. I found this revealing and worthwhile, and I am developing my action plan.

Given that organizations are striving for that healthy balance, what can leaders do to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion? One role for leaders, according to Marisa, is to model their commitment to equity publicly. That commitment includes gaining a greater understanding of cultural competence, inclusion, and respect for diversity. Leaders can advance the cause by showing vulnerability, courage, and enabling healing. Marisa believes that to have change, you must be willing to engage in recovery. Brené Browns points out that one must have the courage to change and that courage takes vulnerability (Brené Brown, Daring Greatly, 2012).

Diversity Asks
who is in the room?



Diversity is the representation of various identities and differences

Equity Asks
who is trying to get in the room, but can't?



Equity focuses on fair treatment, equal opportunity and equal access to resources

Inclusion Asks
have everyone's ideas been heard?



Inclusion is the engagement of the contributions and participation of all people

A Tip

Marisa offers leaders is to engage in self-reflection. “Start with yourself. The biggest thing I have had success with is looking inward, spending time on myself to increase my capacity to lead, and being very confident with who I am, my identity, and my beliefs.” Marisa advises that while self-reflection is needed, it takes time and is ever-evolving.

Brave Spaces

Marisa also recommends that leaders spend time and engage deeply with their leaders and stakeholders on this issue. A conversation on diversity and inclusion should begin with some community commitments or agreements so that people can speak up and receive feedback. Leaders can foster ‘brave spaces’ instead of ‘safe spaces’ for people willing to grow, be challenged, and not take things personally.

Marisa expands on this saying, “I believe that vulnerability involves healing. When a leader who dedicates time to understanding and unpacking their own healing, they increase their capacity to hold empathy and compassion. This can be very powerful.” Being a visible role model sets the tone and the culture of the organization.

Another concrete step is for leaders to create a compelling vision for equity. **But what about leaders who don’t have a strong vision; they know they need to start but don’t know how?** “A vision is about creating an environment where we are growing, we are practicing critical consciousness, and we are seeking anti-racist behaviors.” Being an anti-racist takes a significant level of commitment. In addition to possessing a solid understanding of your own social identities, you have to understand many things, including historical context, intersectionality, power, privilege, and more. It’s a constant balance of deconstructing and reconstructing.

Becoming a more inclusive and diverse organization is challenging, and leaders will likely face some objections. “Facing resistance every single day is making me better. Normalizing resistance, resistance is normal. It shouldn’t take you by surprise. Resistance sometimes happens because people don’t have enough information.”

It is normal to have some fears about having difficult conversations on gender, race, sexual orientation, and religion because many people do not have enough practice doing so and have avoided these topics until now. Marisa reassures us that everyone, even the experts on this journey, makes mistakes, “I mess up all the time. This work is messy. It is willing to recognize your mistakes, apologizing, and doing your homework. Ultimately, it’s not about you. It’s about this greater piece of work we are all working toward.”

Marisa Garverick-Herrera is the founder of Hasta La Equity, a consulting firm dedicated to improving organizational equity by integrating diversity, inclusion, and cultural consciousness within the organization. Hasta La Equity was founded with the mission of providing professional consultation, coaching, and professional learning services to individuals and a wide array of organizations. As part of her consultation, Marisa uses the IDI, the Intercultural Development Inventory, to help individuals and organizations assess their cultural competence. Marisa is a diversity and inclusion specialist with the Denver Public Schools. She is a graduate of The Ohio State University. Marisa is available at hastalaequity@gmail.com.



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