

# Are Your DE&I Efforts Missing This One Critical Component?

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If you want employees to bring their whole selves to work—as most companies say they do—it's important to acknowledge that faith is an essential part of many people's identity.

By Denise Lee Yohn  
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If you're wondering why your diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) efforts are falling short, it might be because they're missing one of the most critical components of diversity: faith.

According to a [new poll](#) conducted by HarrisX on religion and business, American workers are generally supportive of efforts to help religious employees bring their "whole selves" to work. The research also revealed that 80 percent of business leaders think it's "good for company culture" to encourage employees to be open about their faith.

And yet, most companies' DE&I approaches overlook faith. A [study](#) by the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation found that only 37 Fortune 500 companies (7.4 percent) publicly report having faith-oriented employee resource groups (ERGs). While a higher

portion of companies (40 percent) refer to religion on their main diversity landing page, many only do so as part of their general nondiscrimination statement.

If your company is among those that lack institutionalized support of religion or faith in your workforce development efforts, you and your fellow leaders might be underestimating the importance of doing so to achieve authentic, comprehensive and impactful DE&I. Consider that a [Marist poll](#) found that 71 percent of Americans consider themselves to be spiritual. And nearly two-thirds (63 percent) say that religious teachings are a source of moral guidance.

So, if you want employees to bring their whole selves to work—as most companies say they do—you must acknowledge that faith is an essential part of many people's identity.

Perhaps you hesitate to draw attention to what appears to be a personal, sensitive issue. After all, we've all heard we're not supposed to talk about religion, sex or politics. But most companies embrace sexual orientation as an important component of DE&I, and business leaders are becoming increasingly comfortable taking stands for themselves or their companies on political issues such as abortion rights and immigration. So, it no longer makes sense to exclude faith from the business conversation.

### How to Support Employees' Faith, Spirituality

To ensure your company includes religion in its DE&I efforts, encouraging faith-based ERGs is a good starting point. ERGs have become an effective way for companies to promote a respectful and inclusive culture while also bolstering employee recruitment and community engagement. So, sanction the creation of a faith-based ERG(s). Or, if you already have one, promote employee involvement and provide the resources and support needed for it to flourish.

Supporting faith-based ERGs is only the starting point—and perhaps the easiest step—to ensuring robust and thorough DE&I efforts. Cultivating a culture that embraces faith alongside other diversity dimensions requires substantive work, such as providing support for spiritual care and development.

Workplace chaplains would play a valuable role in delivering holistic care for corporations, as they do for sports teams, hospitals and the military. Also consider reimbursement for faith-based leadership development programs, faith-based mentoring/coaching and even faith-based mental health counseling.

Beyond engaging specific DE&I tactics, you must promote a culture of psychological safety around expressions of faith—expressions that range from participating in religious observances and practices to conforming to religious norms in dress and appearance, as well as simply discussing faith in conversations.

Supporting faith in conversations is particularly important because people of faith may hold beliefs that run contrary to the seemingly dominant views on topics such as abortion or LGBTQ issues. Others—especially company leaders—should not assume that everyone agrees with them. Through training, role modeling by leaders and sharing success stories, you can help employees understand how to create space for safe and respectful conversations and contribute to a culture of psychological safety.

Moreover, you can cultivate psychological safety by eliminating unconscious bias. While you may be working on unconscious bias in gender, age and ethnicity, you should also add faith. Start by simply acknowledging that faith is a dimension that can subconsciously affect the way individuals feel and think about others around them and result in discrimination. Then, include faith in training that helps people manage their biases, change their attitudes and behaviors, and track their progress. Sometimes, basic education about different faith traditions can be eye-opening.

Finally, make sure to examine company processes (such as hiring algorithms and interview panels), policies (including health care and leaves), and practices (like meeting scheduling, rewards and recognition) to see how they should be changed to reduce faith-related bias.

Promoting DE&I is hard work, and adding faith may seem like an unnecessary or even unwanted complication. But to neglect or reject it will hold back your diversity efforts overall. After all, your stakeholders—customers, employees and community leaders—are looking for your company to go beyond lip service and virtue signaling. The best way is to do the hard work, focus your efforts on factors at the core of people's identity and take a leap of faith—literally.

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