

# How to Overcome Resistance to Diversity and Inclusion

A Plan to Eliminate Resistance

The Association of BC Professional Foresters Association



CENTRE FOR  
SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE



# Who We Are

Centre for Social Intelligence

We take away your confusion about how to get started on mainstreaming diversity & inclusion in the workplace and help you overcome resistance within the organization.





**"Lead the Change" explains the value proposition of D&I and provides a blueprint on how to take action.**



**"CSI is the D&I expert organization co-leading the Free to Grow in Forestry" initiative.**

**[www.freetogrowinforestry.ca](http://www.freetogrowinforestry.ca)**



# Outline

- What are the benefits of D&I?
- What does resistance look like?
- Why do people resist?
- How do I identify it?
- How do I overcome it?



# Benefits of a diverse and inclusive culture

Organizations that have D&I are:

- 2 x as likely to exceed or meet financial targets
- 3 x more likely to be high performing
- 6 x more likely to be innovative and agile
- 8 x more likely to achieve better business outcomes



# What is Resistance?

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Resistance: The refusal to accept or comply with something or the attempt to prevent something by **ACTION** or **ARGUMENT**.



# Types of Resistance

## ACTIVE RESISTANCE

Hostility, sexist humor, devaluation and disparaging remarks about other's accomplishments or professional commitment, interrupting, denial of access to resources, "what's in it for us?"

## PASSIVE RESISTANCE

Negative body language, foot dragging, inertia, chilly climate, making the procedures more difficult, giving less attention, uncomfortable social atmosphere, giving less access to institutional resources, discomfort, inappropriate treatment.



# Forms of Resistance

- Denial
- Refusal of responsibility
- Inaction
- Placate
- Diminishing
- Shifting
- Reversal
- Extreme Responses
- Separateness
- Competitiveness





# 1. Denial

Denial of the problem or the credibility of the case for change; often blame the victims.



*Example:*

"There is no problem here."

# 2. Refusal of Responsibility

Refusal to recognize responsibility.



*Example:*

"It's not my job to do something about it."

# 3. Inaction

Refusal to implement a change initiative.



*Example:*

"It's not a priority right now."

# 4. Placate

Efforts to appease or pacify those advocating for change in order to limit its impact.



*Example:*

"Yes, yes. We must do something one day."

# 5. Diminishing

Simulating change while covertly undermining it.



*Example:*

"Of course, we'd appoint more women, if only they were more experienced."

# 6. Shifting

Shifting progressive frameworks and goals to meet another group's agenda.



*Example:*

"What about men's rights? Men are victims too, you know."

# 7. Reversal

Reversing or dismantling a change initiative.



*Example:*

"We tried that once and BIPOC+ didn't want to take up the promotion/ training opportunity."

# 8. Extreme Responses

Aggressive, attacking response.



*Example:*

"These feminists (or Indigenous/new immigrants/persons with disabilities) deserve to have pushback, don't they see it's been like this forever?"



# 9. Separateness

People from underrepresented groups that want to separate from D&I to protect themselves from missing out on future opportunities.



*Example:*

"I don't want to be involved in this because my credibility will be questioned."

# 10. Competitiveness

People who are underrepresented competing for positions.



*Example:*

"There are only so few positions at the top and if anyone is going to fill that senior job, it's me."

# Psychology of Resistance

The psychological barriers behind resistance can act as a wall preventing an individual from accepting new values or ideologies.

Understanding the psychology behind it is key to overcoming it.



# Why do People Resist?

People don't like  
changing the status  
quo.



# Which Group is Likely to Resist?

Often the most likely to resist is middle managers.

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Individuals at various levels of an organization can show resistance.

Research shows however, that middle-managers are particularly resistant to change or adopting new ways of doing things.



# Reasons for Resistance

Common reasons for resistance to D&I actions include:



1. Lack of awareness



2. Impact on current job role and workload



3. Organizations' past performance with change



4. Lack of support from those in charge

# 1. Lack of Awareness



## Reason

- Some people resist D&I because they lack awareness about why there is a need to do anything or don't understand the nature of what needs to be done.
- This can show up in many forms including: not seeing a problem on gender inequities, ignoring gender related conversations, finding it all irrelevant, considering gender equality policies as unnecessary, or resisting any change at all.

# 1. Lack of Awareness



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## *Example*

During a team meeting, one employee expresses that they don't think it's necessary to make a fuss about creating a workplace that makes underrepresented groups feeling they belong. "What's the point in that effort? I don't feel there's a problem here!"



# 1. Lack of Awareness



## Solution

- EDUCATE & INFORM - It's important to convey the cost benefit analysis of doing something versus not - in both economic and social terms.

# 2. Impact on Current Job Role and Workload



## Reason

- Many employees resist change when they believe there will be a negative impact on their job role or workload. Specifically, employees are resistant to changes that:
  - Increase the amount of work they are required to perform
  - Cause a loss of position or power when a D&I plan is implemented
  - Induces fear that the change and the associated measures would “work against them”
- Possibilities of losing chances for promotion because of quotas or feeling unfair and uncomfortable to be promoted by the quota, can create considerable resistance in many forms.

# 2. Impact on Current Job Role and Workload



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## *Example*

A male employee comes to you and says they are concerned they will not receive an upcoming promotion because the focus of the D&I initiatives seems to favour women.

# 2. Impact on Current Job Role and Workload



## Solution

- State that all people want to be hired and promoted based on their merit, not based on a quota. The organization is creating a hiring process that seeks out the most qualified candidate regardless of gender, race, religion, or origin.
- Articulate that having a transparent hiring process in place ensures any systemic, institutional or cultural inequalities are eliminated.
- Make it clear the organization has a goal of being the most competitive among its peers and having a diverse team strengthens the bottom line.

# 3. Organizations' Past Performance with Change



## Reason

- The organization's past failure to shift the workplace culture to be more diverse and inclusive can cause a lack of commitment to a current effort.
- The feeling of "change fatigue" can come up when introducing a new change initiative or people can lose excitement about a change if things move slowly.

# 3. Organizations' Past Performance with Change



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## Example

Two years ago, the *Acme Company* developed a D&I policy. Actions were said to be implemented over the next year, however, no changes have been seen. This year, the management introduced a new D&I strategy and are finding employees are not enthusiastic or inspired by it.

# 3. Organizations' Past Performance with Change



## Solution

- Leadership must display commitment and enthusiasm when initiating a D&I strategy to show employees they are serious about the change.
- Establishing a Chief Diversity and Inclusion Office dedicated to implementing the culture change is key.
- Leadership must model the desired behaviour and ensure that all people feel they are valued and respected.

# 4. Lack of Support from Leadership Team



## Reason

- A lack of visible support or commitment from senior management contributes to employee resistance, especially when those in charge fail to communicate directly with employees or when employees lack trust in senior management.
- Organizations with less resources might prefer to maintain their status quo since change requires capital and personnel with appropriate skills and time.



# 4. Lack of Support from Those in Charge



## *Example*

Your organization has decided to commit to developing and implementing a D&I strategy. An employee in senior management who is leading this change has casually said that it will likely cut into the organization's annual budget. Other employees have overheard these comments on a number of occasions and are now expressing concern that any actions taken on D&I could affect their annual bonus.

# 4. Lack of Support from Those in Charge



## Solution

- Ensure the D&I strategy is well coordinated among the HR, Communications and Leadership Teams so that all messaging on D&I is clear and understood.
- Develop a D&I Team across the organization that can be the "eyes and ears" on the ground for senior management, ensuring messaging is consistent from the most senior levels to the entry level positions.
- Explain that the culture shift will result in greater benefits - both financially and socially - than any cost associated with its development and implementation.

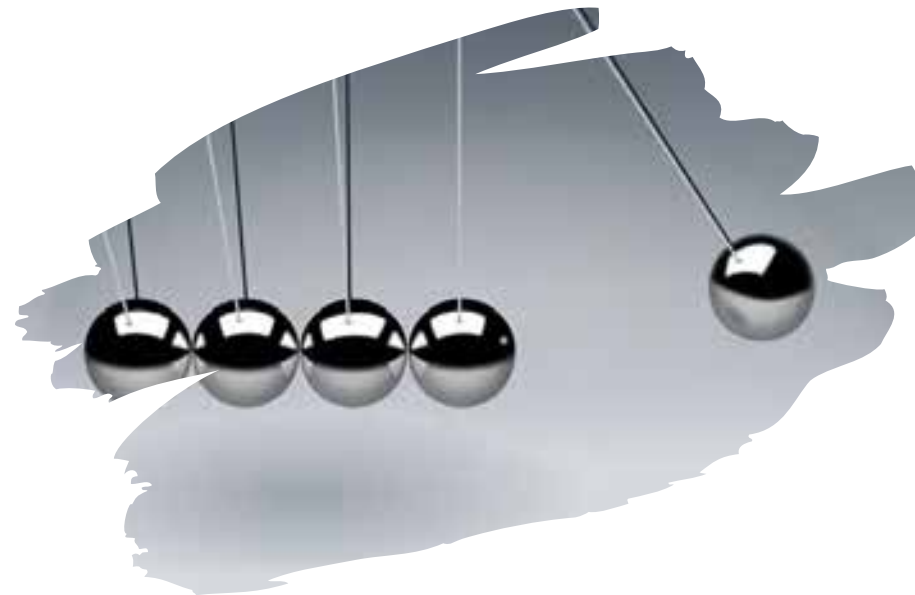
# When is Resistance Encountered?

Resistance might be encountered when:

The change is  
being initiated



Moving into  
implementation



Moving toward the end  
goal



# Overcoming Resistance

Why is it important?

- Create time delays from engaging with those who keep circling on the “why” this is happening instead of getting on with the “how”
- Cause outcomes of D&I objectives to be delayed or not realized
- Avoid absenteeism



# How to Identify Resistance

1. Observed behaviour showing a lack of adoption or buy-in

This may be shown through active or passive resistance.

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# How to Identify Resistance

2. Use feedback tools to solicit views on a D&I strategy

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# How to Identify Resistance

3. Seek feedback through informal networks and Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)

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# How to Identify Resistance



4. Conduct meetings, interviews, focus groups and training workshops



# Strategies to Overcome Resistance

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There are both corporate and individual strategies that can be used to create greater acceptance of this new workplace culture.



# Individual Strategies

Individual strategies are designed to help anyone at any level to interact effectively with those who seem reluctant to accept a diverse and inclusive workplace culture.

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# Individual Strategies

*Approach to D&I resistance 5 step process:*

1. Identify the root cause of resistance.
2. Address each concern raised.
3. Provide ongoing coaching opportunities and gather feedback from the employee or manager over a defined period of time.
4. Communicate the consequences for not supporting the change.
5. Implement the consequences for not supporting the change.

*Note: Usually steps 1-3 only are required*



# When Engaging the Individual

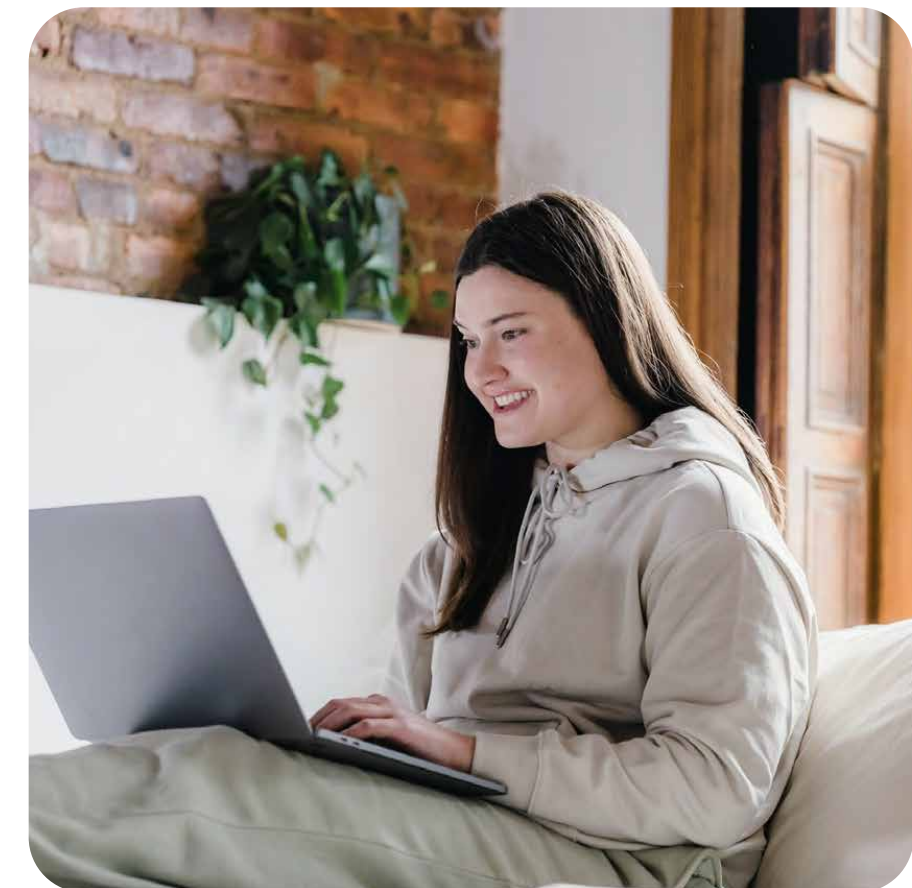
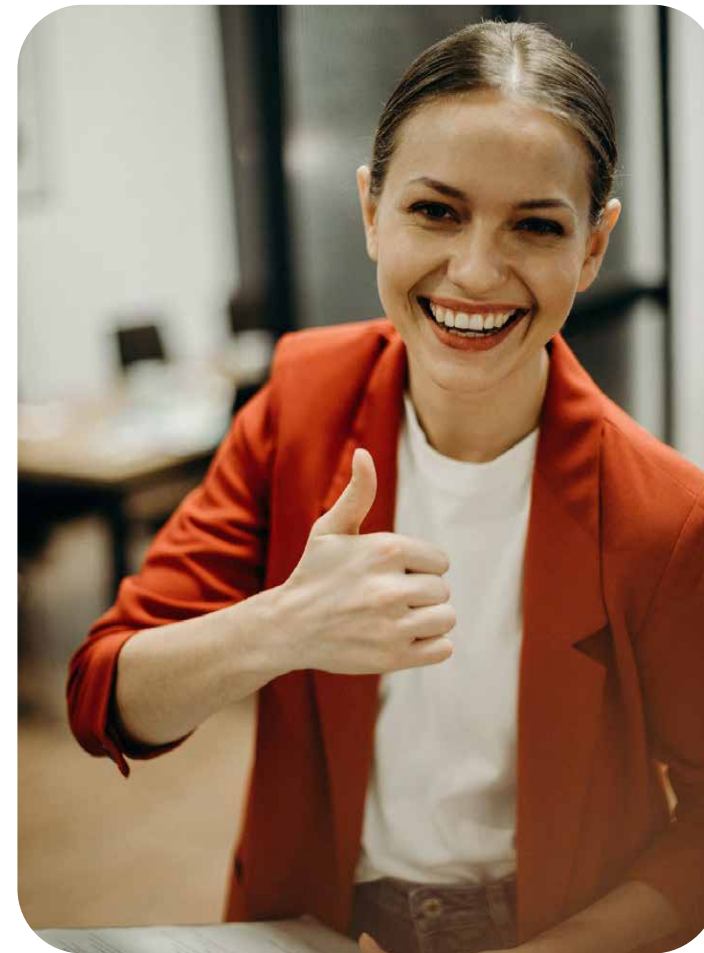
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There are a number of helpful suggestions to use when engaging people who are resisting, as well as things to not do so you can avoid making things worse.



# Do's

Let's look at 10 tactics to help engage with those who are resisting the idea of a diverse and inclusive culture.



# 1. Listen and Understand Objections

When listening, managers should avoid debating or arguing with employees.

The goal is to listen, understand and provide clarity about the process and end goal of a diverse and inclusive workplace culture.

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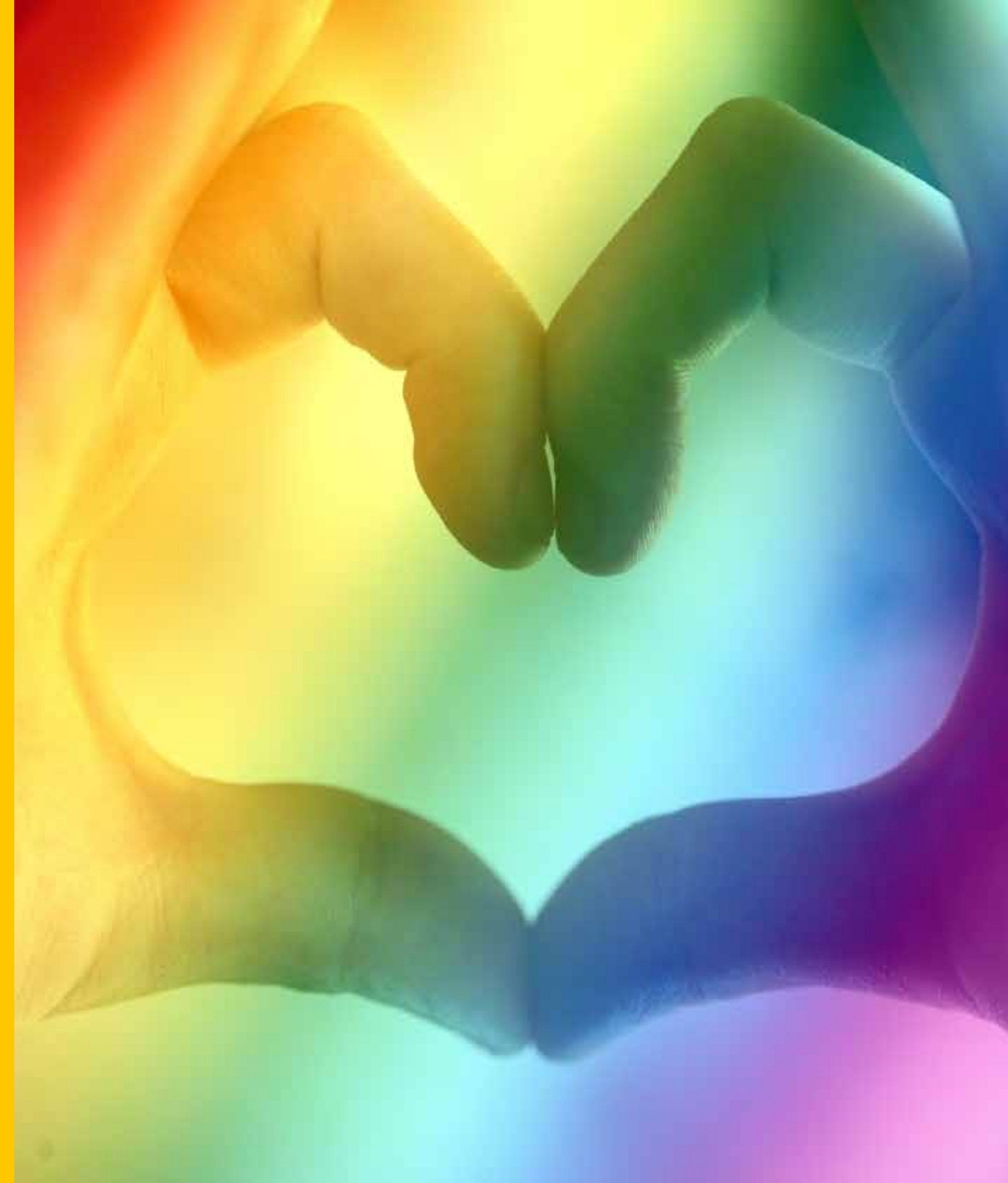
## 2. Focus on the “What” and Let Go of the “How”

In some instances, it is effective for managers to let go of the “how” and simply communicate “what” needs to change. Managers can share a clear vision of the end state, along with specific goals and timelines with employees. Employees then take on the task of achieving that vision.

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# 3. Remove Barriers

Removing barriers is essential to having productive conversation. Through coaching and further discussions, education and training, individuals can air their views and learn new responses to what is happening.







## 4. Provide Simple, Clear Choices and Consequences

Managers can facilitate the D&I plan by being clear about the choices available to employees in an effort to support staff (e.g. attend training, champion D&I, speak with managers and coaches).

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# 5. Create Hope

Senior leaders and middle managers can create the conditions for successful uptake of diversity and inclusion by sharing their passion for it, creating excitement and enthusiasm, and creating hope in a better future for employees and the organization.

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## 6. Show the Benefits in a Real and Tangible Way

For some employees, seeing is believing. Demonstrating the benefits of a diverse and inclusive culture in a real and tangible way can spur on employees.



# 7. Make a Personal Appeal

When a manager has a close working relationship with an employee, using a personal appeal to support the GDI plan can create the motivation to be more accepting (e.g. “I believe in this culture change.” or “This is important to me because ...”). If the manager doesn’t have a close relationship, they can look for an ally who can do this.

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## 8. Convert the Strongest Dissenters

Focus energy on a few strong resistors rather than on large groups of employees. This allows you to:

- regain power over background conversations and
  - gain potentially influential champions.
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# 9. Incentive and/or Recognition

Executives responsible for D&I initiatives can create incentives such as bonus pay, awards or recognition for creating and maintaining a diverse team and tie it to the employee's performance measurement plan. This inspires others to follow suit.

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# 10. Create a Healthy Culture

If, after all of these tactics have been explored, there are still some employees that are outwardly undermining D&I efforts, the best way to manage them can be to discuss opportunities outside the organization in a respectful manner.

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# Don'ts





# 1. Ignoring Resistance and Expecting it to Go Away

Ignoring resistance doesn't make it go away and in some cases can make it worse.



A photograph showing a person's hands writing in a notebook on a table. The person is wearing a dark jacket and a black beaded bracelet. The table has a laptop, a pen, and some papers. The background is blurred, showing other people at the table.

## 2. Not Listening to and Understanding the Concerns of Those Impacted

It is important to listen and ask questions to understand the root causes so you can effectively respond to their concerns.

Validate their perspectives and show empathy.

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# 3. Attempting to Force a Solution

Applying force from senior management is not an effective way to get employees to onboard a diverse and inclusive workplace culture.

It reduces buy-in and engagement of those feeling impacted and can make it harder to gain acceptance.

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## 4. Underestimating the Resistance

Anticipating resistance allows you to prepare for it.

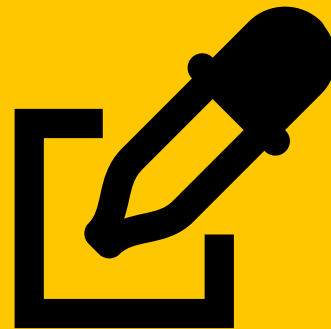
Can avoid getting hung up on the "why" and allows you to move quickly into taking action.

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# 5. Communicating Ineffectively

Poor communication increases the likelihood that you will have resistance.

Poor communication includes such things as: inconsistent messaging, incorrect messages, incorrect senders, bad timing, dishonest information, and using inappropriate modes of communication to confront resisters.



# Corporate vs Individual Strategies

Corporate and individual approaches to dealing with resistance should be implemented in tandem and be seen as complementary to one another.

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Corporate strategies help to identify and tackle resistance at a large-scale across an organization.

Individual strategies can help to engage and transform the perspectives of those most resistant to change.





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Questions?

