GCOMMERCE SOLUTIONS

Promoting DEI in the Workplace

DIGITAL E-BOOK

2024

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) covers a variety of topics and tactics related to the fair treatment of all people. In the workplace, this means creating a space where all employees feel safe and welcome.

More and more businesses are starting to implement DEI programs, but there's no real standard, given the broadness of the topic. Some programs are designed to support underrepresented social groups, some to compile employee resources, and others to signify a progressive company culture.

Because of this variation, it can be hard to decide which strategies will work best for your business.

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The Importance of DEI in the Workplace

GCommerce Solutions has firsthand experience with this struggle. We knew we wanted to improve DEI in our workplace but had yet to learn what would work in the long run or even how to start. Through employee collaboration and executive leadership, we were able to fine-tune an approach that works for us.

The perfect DEI program looks different for every business, but there are a few basic steps to identify your sore spots and build an efficient program for your specific needs.

Before you can build an effective DEI program, it's important to understand the true purpose of DEI. To promote DEI in the workplace, you need a comprehensive understanding of why it matters and how it affects your coworkers on a daily basis.

How Good DEI Affects Employees

At the most basic level, DEI programs ensure no employee feels valued less than their coworkers. They eliminate that "outcast" feeling and ensure employees have a fair share of power and prestige within the business commensurate only with their skills and contributions. However, the most effective DEI programs step this up a notch.

While basic programs and policies ensure that all employees have a level playing field, comprehensive DEI efforts instead aim to elevate all employees, providing them with the support and care they need to achieve their full potential.

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How Good DEI Affects Employees

These more advanced DEI programs create a sense of community within your business and provide feelings of recognition, validation, and empowerment for your employees.

Basic DEI efforts can offset some of the dread of coming to work some people may face, but advanced DEI programs can make the workplace an actively pleasant space.

These programs prove that you care for the well-being of your employees and that care will be redirected into their work. When employees feel safe and appreciated in the workplace, your business will see increased retention, output more high-quality work, and even encourage employees to go above and beyond to improve your business.
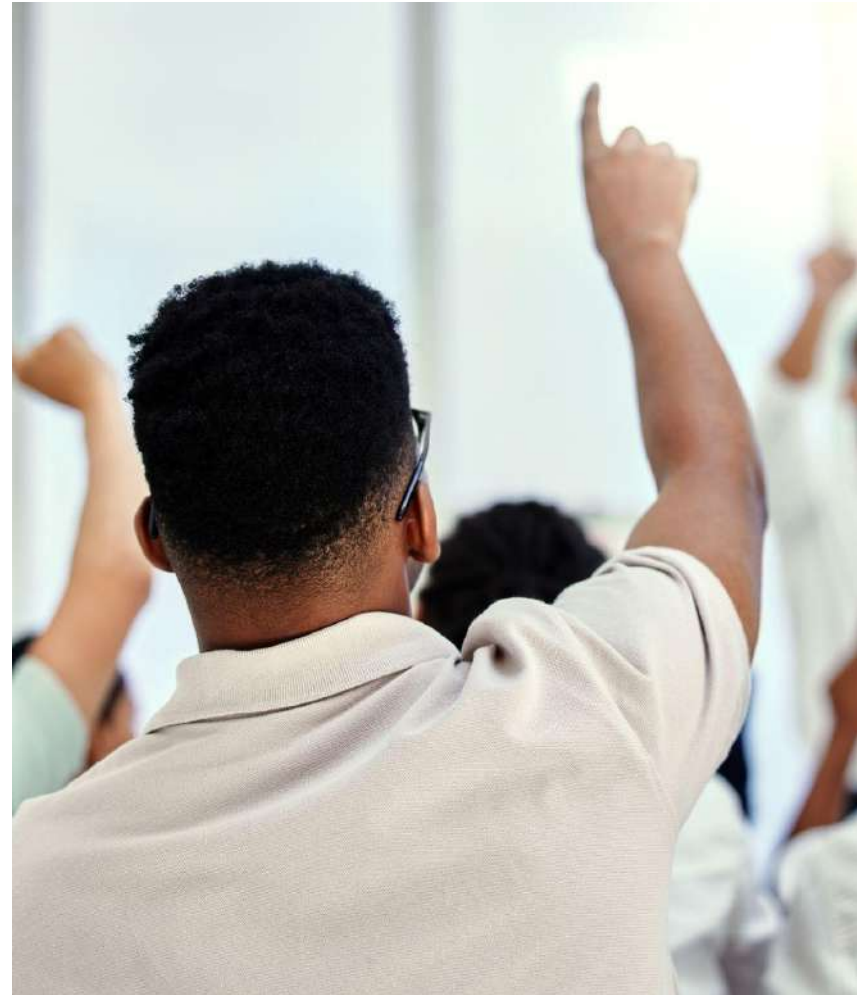
The New Hire Perspective

As a new employee joining a business with a DEI program, you feel welcomed into a workplace that doesn't just talk about DEI but lives and breathes these principles. Finding yourself in a company with a well-established DEI effort can be an unexpected and delightful surprise and make you more enthusiastic to join the team. It swiftly becomes apparent that this commitment to DEI is not merely a superficial gesture but a fundamental aspect of the company's culture, powerfully shaping your experience as a new employee.

A good DEI program also provides opportunities for new hires to connect with colleagues from diverse backgrounds, and these connections not only make work more enjoyable but also significantly enhance collaboration and creativity among all of your employees.

As a new hire, it's reassuring to be part of an organization that values you for who you are, supports your growth, and actively works toward a more inclusive future. And a DEI program is a great way to establish this rapport with new employees from day one.

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How to Start Promoting DEI in the Workplace

Now that you know what good DEI can do for your business, how do you actually achieve it? Every company has its own strong and weak points, so DEI efforts need to be tailored on a case-by-case basis. However, there are a few basic steps to take when creating a DEI program to ensure the most effective results.

1. Identify Your Company's Needs

To determine your business's weak points, start by looking at underperforming areas. Find your least productive, most burned out, or most unfriendly employees, and see if they share common traits. Are they part of an underrepresented social group? Do they report to the same manager? Do they perform the same daily tasks and responsibilities? While a single employee can always be an outlier, these kinds of trends across a group usually signify a larger issue within the business, and they're a perfect place to start with your DEI efforts.

However, these trends won't always give you the whole picture. During the first stages of designing your DEI program, make sure to ask your coworkers what they need. If the goal of good DEI is to make every employee feel welcomed and cared for, there's no better source for information than the employees themselves. Based on this feedback, in conjunction with larger trends, you can then solidify your goals and design a DEI program that effectively targets your specific sore spots.

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2. Let Your Employees Lead

Once you've identified your needs, it's time to establish a formal DEI program. While there are several options, it's a good idea to choose a format where your employees have a direct, significant influence on the program's outcomes. As noted above, there's no better source for information than the employees who will benefit most from a program like this. Including your employees in the decision-making process is also a show of good faith and an element of DEI in itself. Giving your employees a direct voice shows that you want to solve the real issues within your business and that your DEI program isn't just a bid for brownie points.

At GCommerce, we've included employees through roundtable-style DEI meetings. While completely optional for our staff, these meetings are open to anyone in the company who wants to join. Our "DEI Study Group" meets for about an hour every other week, discussing potential points of improvement, working on materials to educate coworkers, and providing our own unique perspectives from across the company. While this solution won't work for every business, it's a great example of including your employees and letting them lead your DEI effort.

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3. Provide Executive Support

Letting employees lead doesn't mean executives are off the hook, though. Not all employees have the power to enact certain high-level changes and policy adjustments, so executive support is absolutely necessary for any successful DEI program. Without this support, making actual changes within the business is far more difficult, rendering your DEI program more or less useless.

Executive involvement also helps on a social level. It proves that the desire for better DEI goes up the chain of command, and it's always reassuring to know that someone with power is willing to go to bat for you. It also helps avoid an "us vs. them" mentality among employees. Direct involvement from executives brings all employees to the same level, increasing feelings of community and reducing the risk of resentment or hostility towards management.

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4. Share Your Successes

The final piece of an effective DEI program is two-way communication with your employees. Many businesses wax on about their progressive efforts, but there's very little evidence to back up those claims. When your DEI program leads to a tangible change, share that with your company! Prove to your employees that their opinions and needs are being taken seriously and that your DEI efforts are more than just lip service. Maintain regular communication on policy changes and other updates, and keep those DEI conversations going.

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Maintaining a Workplace DEI Program

So you've done the work to create a workplace DEI program, and you've found employees willing to take on the challenge. Now what? How do you keep employees excited and engaged with DEI programming? How do you keep your momentum going? All questions are valid, and once you get your DEI program off the ground, you'll soon be asking them, too.

Don't Lose Sight of Your Original Goal

When creating new company programming, it's easy to get stuck in the mundaneness of it all, and you may need to remember the main reasons why the group was created in the first place. When maintaining a workplace DEI program, it's important to occasionally resurface your original goals to keep a clear picture of the past, present, and future.

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Keep Seasonality in Mind

Every company faces seasonality, whether that means busy work periods or just the highs and lows of employee morale. It's important to remember that your DEI program is not the sole job your participants have, and it's okay to have periods of low productivity. Some quarters might not produce much in terms of output, but that's okay. Flexibility is key with volunteer groups, and understanding this will help your program continue toward success in the long run.

Feel Free to Break What's Not Broken

This might seem silly, especially after you've put in countless hours perfecting current programming and creating workplace DEI initiatives. However, just because something is implemented and working well doesn't mean there's no room for improvement. Question everything constantly. Why? DEI is always changing and evolving. If your DEI program doesn't take this into consideration, then it will fall behind.
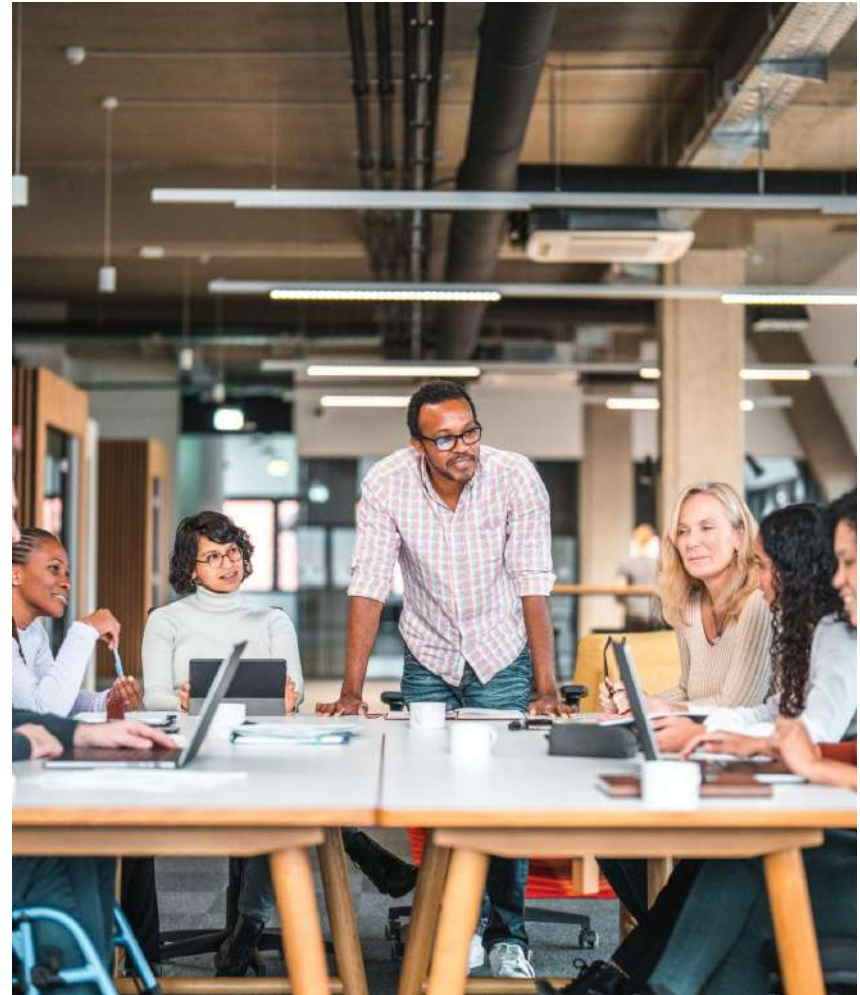
Remember That It's a Journey, Not a Destination

Finally, remember that your DEI group is a journey with no endpoint or finish line. Think of DEI as a lifestyle, not a phase. Your participants and fellow colleagues will grow and learn alongside each other as time goes on, and the pace of that will ebb and flow. There's no wrapping everything up with a nice bow after a job well done; new goals and accomplishments will keep coming. Your DEI efforts might look completely different within five years, and that's the beautiful thing.

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Getting Over a Plateau

As mentioned above, part of the journey for any workplace DEI program is a point where it feels like there's nothing left to do and there are no new ideas to implement. When you've already accomplished so many goals, what do you do next? How do you advance an already well-oiled machine? Remember, this is normal, and if it hasn't happened yet…just know that it will.

This is actually something we've been working our way through at GCommerce. While we don't have all the answers yet, we do have a few ideas to keep the inspiration flowing.

Acknowledge That You Hit a Plateau

Seems easy, right? But sometimes, plateaus can go on longer than they should because the group is afraid to voice the truth. It's easy to mistake plateaus for failure, but being stuck, burned out, or simply treading water is not failing. Sometimes, all it takes to get the conversation moving forward is being able to admit that your DEI program has hit a plateau.
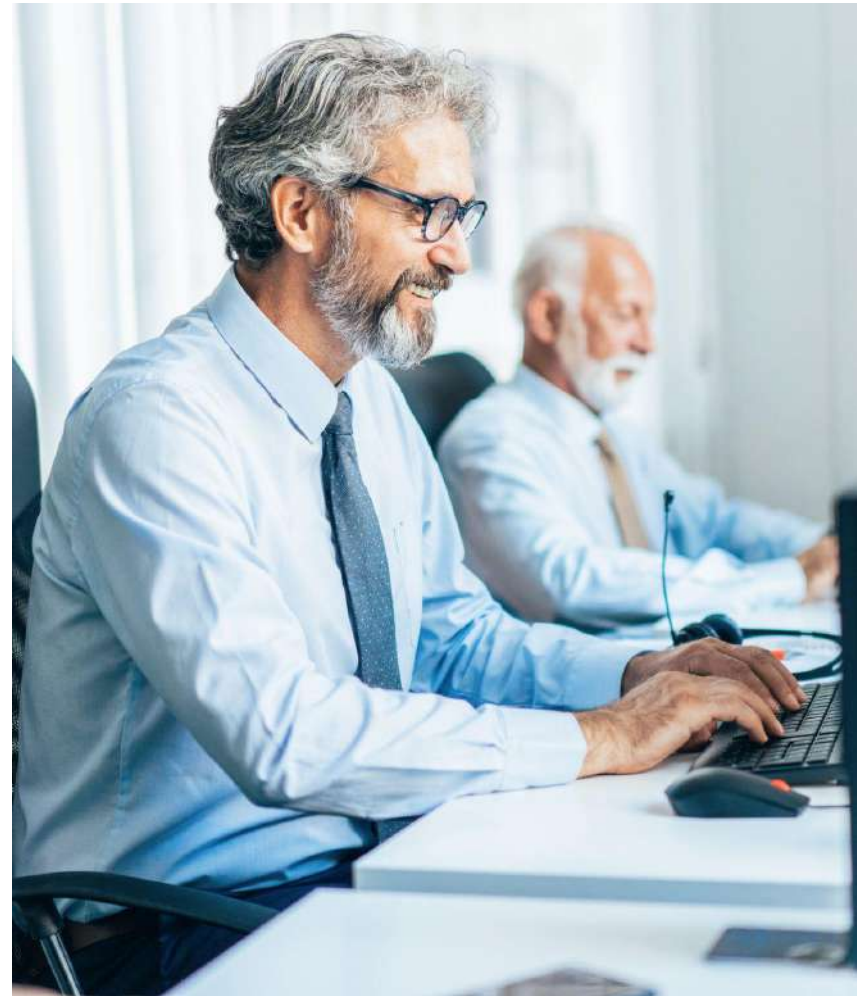
Resurface Rejected Ideas

Remember when your DEI program first started, and you had a million ideas? Most of those were probably set aside or marked as "no-gos." However, this could be a great starting place to get some new initiatives or programming started. Maybe those ideas didn't work then, but they certainly could work now. Even if they fail, revisiting these old ideas is a great exercise and could inspire new ideas for the future.

Ask For Help

Another simple one, but getting the entire company involved is a great way to refresh a workplace DEI program. When the same few employees do all the work and start to approach burnout, why not ask for outside help? This allows your program to incorporate fresh perspectives and also allows other colleagues who may not have time to fully commit to your DEI program to participate in small ways.

Asking for help could come in the form of extra hands on deck, help with brainstorming sessions, or even simple company surveys. Try asking the whole company for their opinions on current programming, areas of improvement, and/or potential new ideas they'd like to see.

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Start Reaching for Those "Unattainable" Goals

Every group has those "out-of-reach" goals that they

dream of but think will never happen. Hitting a plateau

might be the perfect time to start focusing on those

dreams because you have the time and clearly need

something new to focus on. Even if those goals never

become reality, you'll probably learn something new

along the way or think of some new inspiration.

Moving Forward

Promoting DEI in the workplace is a daunting task. There's no getting around it - workplace DEI programs take a lot of planning and hard work to be effective. However, the long-term benefits of these programs are more than worth it. Knowing that your employees feel supported and cared for… there's nothing else like it.

If you have questions on how to get started with a workplace DEI program or anything else we've mentioned here, we are always available to lend a helping hand.

Or maybe your business has already implemented a DEI program, and you have other ideas that we haven't touched on. Feel free to reach out and let us know! We're always open to feedback and new ideas for improvement.

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Want to Learn More?

- Read more about [DEI Origins at GCommerce](#).

- View Impact Reports from our "DEI Study Group" to get ideas for your own DEI program.

  - [6 Months DEI Impact Report](#)

  - [2023 DEI Impact Report](#)

- Check out the "Diversity, Equity & Inclusion" section of our [digital marketing blog](#) for even

  more content!

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Thank you for reading

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