

Inclusion Handbook: 13 Habits of “For All” Organizations

WHY COMPANIES COMMITTED TO DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION HAVE A FUTURE (AND THOSE WHO AREN'T, DON'T).

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The Way of the World

A 2021 Harvard Business School report sponsored by SHRM and Trusaic discovered that while diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) has emerged as a key strategic priority for nearly 70% of today's companies, only a third of those organizations felt they'd made real progress. Yet, they're doing the work. Four out of five companies have at least one person tasked with advancing DEI goals, and 87% are using metrics to track those goals. On the other hand, there remains a disconnect between what's expected and what's rewarded (only 12% of companies incentivize related improvements) and between rhetoric and action (only a third of companies recruit from nontraditional populations).

Further, while 40% have created Chief Diversity Officer positions (a role that was essentially unheard of five years ago), many have this person reporting to their company's head of HR, which confines the scope of the role to employees. But the issues at play span from relationships with customers to marketing, from how the company makes money to how it treats vendors, from corporate policies to who's on the board. What they need is someone who's empowered to assess all facets of company life and lead its transformation into a place marked by consciousness and belonging, that's equitable, just, and fully committed to diversity. This challenge, however, isn't confined to business. Getting this right is the only viable way forward for every aspect of society, from public office to congregations, from municipalities to charities, from shared culture to civil rights. It's how, together, we create for ourselves a future. But that's not necessarily the route we're taking.

Part of the problem is with our starting point. We often think of inclusion as something we're doing for them, for "those people", often at a cost to us. We, as the power majority, think it's about our benevolence – our willingness to offer them, society's unfortunates, a bit of our abundance. In our minds, we're graciously sharing with them "our" jobs and economic opportunities, "our" water fountains, diner stools and seats at the front of the bus. For us, inclusion means giving them the chance to play in our sports leagues, serve in our military, attend our schools, and participate in our political process. We rightfully feel good that women are now in the C-suite, gays can get married and Muslims are in Congress.

Yet, with each concession, we can't help but also feel a bit put-upon, as if we're constantly being asked to give up more of what's considered to be rightfully ours. And that's exactly where we go wrong. Because while this might once have been the way of the world, the world itself is a different place today. I write often about America's GSS – our Great Sociological Shift. In fact, it seems to be the foundation of most everything of any importance I have to say. That's because, like the melting icecaps that are producing more hurricanes, or the collapsing biosphere which is depleting our food supply, it's another change that's not readily obvious, but that has already incalculably altered our lives.

We're living in a time when the very fabric of American society is evolving and at a time when, in every way we currently measure, we're transforming into a post-majority nation. For instance, in 2012, non-Anglo births, for the first time in US history, surpassed Anglo births, setting us on a trajectory that will render us a nation with no ethnic majority in just 20 years. 2017 was the year non-churchgoers, again, for the first time, surpassed churchgoers in the United States. And people openly identifying as LGBTQ+ has grown from 2.5%

among Generation X, to 25% among Millennials, to nearly 40% among Gen Z. Generation Alpha, already our nation's first non-Anglo-majority cohort, is also on track to be the first where more people identify as some version of non-straight rather than straight.

And this isn't just here. This foundational shifting is happening all over the world. This new breed of humanity isn't just diverse in ways we don't have categories for; they're interconnected, by everything from social media to a global economy, from culture blending to global travel, in ways we can scarcely imagine. The Alphas are not only non-majority, they're the first non-racialized, non-genderized, non-heteronormative, non-religionized, fully diversity-embracing generation in human history. As such, they're radically redefining who we mean when we speak of "we, the people". Further, this diverse constituency will soon hold the cultural, political and economic power. They'll determine everything from who gets elected to which companies survive. All of which means that for incumbent entities, though we think today's inclusion efforts are about creating a place for them, they aren't. They're about creating one for ourselves.

The Work of Inclusion

My acute awareness of the shift we're undergoing stems back to the mid-90s. I was living and working in San Francisco where I, a young, soon-to-be former pastor, was nearing nearly a decade of work with the city's AIDS victims. I'd come to realize that the wildly inclusive articulation of spirituality, one forged in the fires of such tragedy, simply couldn't live and thrive in the manicured gardens of a denomination that declared AIDS to be "God's wrath". That was my first encounter with an institution that was increasingly incompatible with the diverse people we were becoming. It wouldn't be the last.

It was around that time that the dotcom craze, our version of the gold rush, kicked off. Seemed like everyone was trying some kind of idea they hoped would make them instantly rich. I saw what was happening to the city and to its inhabitants, including those who'd held on long enough for drugs that turned AIDS from a death sentence into a chronic illness to arrive. Rents skyrocketed with people flocking to live in SF, then commute by air-conditioned Google bus to Silicon Valley each day. Meanwhile, the AIDS epidemic morphed into a homelessness epidemic; one that still plagues the city today. This was my second window into the problem.

A group of social entrepreneurs brought me in to share lessons we could learn from the crisis, including the importance of infusing humanity into even mundane practices, and afterward, one of the attendees asked if I could advise their startup. I had little formal understanding of profit margins and private equity. I wasn't the right person to help them with P/E ratios or when to buy or sell shares. But I understood one thing - that the culture of any group is an aggregate of what its individual members bring to it. And with that understanding, I could help these companies adopt practices that reflected and reinforced the humanitarian values they already held. That evolved into a small advisory where I'd work with founders, privately and quietly, only by word-of-mouth, and only those who were truly serious - not just looking to improve their brand. Today, this - never losing sight of the human element - still feels like the crux of the matter.

For me, this orientation stems all the way back to my growing up years in Birmingham. Despite being known as the "most racist city in America," in an America that was itself deeply troubled by racism, I was met with unfathomable kindness and goodness from all quarters, black and white. So, 12-year-old me sought to pass

that on in the ways I could, from petitioning the City of Birmingham to provide free lunches in the summers for kids who would be eligible for free lunch during the school year to canvassing on behalf of Richard Arrington's successful bid to become Birmingham's first African American mayor, just 15 years after Martin Luther King penned the *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*. And throughout my life, the faith in humanity that was forged there has been reinforced and rewarded in more ways than I can count. Today, this same sentiment, a determined belief in us, is woven into the foundation of my ideas about societies - how they change, why they end, and what it takes to become, as President Lincoln described, "a nation that can endure".

But getting to a better place requires unearthing the system beneath the symptoms of an ailing society. That's what Krishnalal Shridharani did. In *War Without Violence*, he both systematized Gandhi's revolutionary approach to social change and made it accessible to Westerners and in doing so, altered the course of American Civil Rights. Icons like Bayard Rustin, James Farmer, George Houser and Pauli Murray came across Shridharani's just-published doctoral thesis in 1939 and were all profoundly impacted by it. At the time, the future Rev. Dr. King was ten years old.

Fast-forward to 1955, when Montgomery's prominent civil rights leadership, including E.D. Nixon, President of the Montgomery NAACP and a member of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters established by Bayard's mentor, A. Philip Randolph, Rev. Ralph Abernathy, and Rev. E.N. French selected a 26-year-old Martin to lead the newly established Montgomery Improvement Association, the organizing vehicle for the boycott. We know much of the story from there – Montgomery, sit-ins, Freedom Rides, Birmingham, March on Washington, Selma, the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act and the Poor People's Campaign. Not to mention all that came after, everything from the Rainbow Coalition and women's rights to same-sex marriage and the 2020 protests. All this work shares one thing in common – the work of inclusion.

Solving Enough Problems

The uncomfortable truth is that societies end. And not just ancient ones like Rome or the Mongol Empire. In *This Land Is Your Land*, I describe it this way: *Societies, like everything else, exist in perpetual states of dynamism. The question is not whether they'll face challenges that could be their undoing. They will, many times over. Whether confronted by rivals, impacted by disease, visited by catastrophe or simply worn down by the sum of their own choices, one thing human history proves is that any society that refuses to change is one that won't last.* The idea of societies having a life cycle or coming to an end shouldn't be so surprising to us. After all, we saw the end of the USSR in our lifetime and our own Civil War was waged to prevent Southern states from creating their own sovereign nation. In reality, each generation faces choices that may very well make them that civilization's final one, whether they recognize that about themselves or realize the significance of the choices they're making.

Avoiding this unfortunate fate begins with grasping what Martin said about how things are bound together, that all of life is "*caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny,*" and that "*whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.*" Because though we think of ourselves as separate, each of us is inextricably linked to the rest of us, and our generation to the ones before and after it. Once we realize this, we grasp that our society, like the biosphere, isn't just something we can take from, but that it's an

ecosystem; one we must tend to and care for if we want to survive. This is essentially what generativity looks like.

Looking back, we get how segregation worked, how it used racial grouping to determine all aspects of people's lives. But what we miss is how we replaced racialized barriers with economic ones – everything from state legislatures that don't pay legislators enough to live on, which means that, practically, only people of means can serve in public office, to exclusive clubs with exorbitant fees that prevent most people from joining. But this isn't just economic. The same tactics undergird all forms of exclusion, from political to religious, social to cultural. These growing stress fractures have led us to a decisive inflection point, one where we get to decide three critical questions; whether we'll be a nation committed to the well-being of just some of us or all of us, whether we'll be governed by the people or by a faction, and whether we'll pull humankind backward or propel our social infrastructure forward.

Two final things to remember about societies: First, though we act as if they're indestructible, they're far from it. They're actually more like submarines or space shuttles, where one massive miscalculation, or even a cascading series of small ones, can rip them open. But they're also amazingly resilient, or at least as resilient and resourceful as we, the people are. Matt Damon's character, Mark Watney, in the film, *The Martian*, describing how he survived, said: "At some point, everything's gonna go south on you and you're going to say, this is it. This is how I end. Now you can either accept that, or you can get to work. That's all it is. You just begin. You do the math. You solve one problem and you solve the next one, and then the next. And if you solve enough problems, you get to come home." This same wisdom applies not just to stranded astronauts, but to societies.

Edward and Wilma

Some years ago, I was brought in to advise a company that was struggling to diversify its workforce. According to them, they were having trouble finding qualified candidates who also brought diversity. They thought the problem was with the talent pool. But anyone who works in this field knows that there's no shortage of diverse talent out there. The problem lies either with us, our unspoken resistance to inclusion, with our processes, or both.

To a person, there was strong commitment to diversity as a value; something they genuinely wanted for their company, so I moved on to process. Three issues were immediately apparent. First, they'd been relying on their personal networks to get the word out, and since most people they knew shared their heritage and/or culture, the people who responded were like the ones they had. Second, diverse candidates were often screened out because they lacked things like advanced degrees. And third, their interview process placed a lot more weight on easy fit with their already established culture than on an applicant's unique value add.

Because our corporate processes are regimented, automated and based on a set of criteria, it's easy to assume that they're agnostic, objective and fair, but they almost never are. They're not neutral; they're shaped by our every contact with them. I facilitated a discussion among the senior team about how our unconscious assumptions can, despite our intentions, result in a process that's compromised from the start. I then shared findings from work I'd previously done with an assorted group of experts. In it, we worked

backwards from job profiles, candidate requirements, schedules and demands, as well as where positions were advertised and how interviews were conducted, in order to gain a picture of who those processes defined as their ideal candidate.

Through this, we discovered an important insight – that despite genuine efforts to diversify, the overall jobs market itself has been geared toward its own ideal applicant, and is designed to attract, employ and advance candidates that fit this unspoken, very homogeneous profile. This one insight, that, personally, we can be completely devoid of bias and even anti-bias, but still be using processes that perpetuate it, was enlightening. Our job listings might say, “diverse candidates encouraged to apply”, but it is these implicit, embedded characteristics that together, identify the jobs market’s *actual* ideal candidate. With that in mind, meet two composites – “Edward Executive” and “Wilma Worker”:

Edward Executive

It’s not news to any of us that we live in a society where it is more advantageous to be able to identify as white than as of color. People fresh off the boat over a century ago figured this out, as had many of us; sometimes even before entering first grade. This perception automatically elevates certain kids and diminishes others from childhood on. Similarly, upon reaching adulthood, studies overwhelmingly confirm a significant bias toward Caucasians in the hiring process. So, in this composite, Edward Executive is Caucasian. But that’s not all: As is indicated by the name, Edward is both male and most likely bound for the executive suite; if he’s not there already.

Additionally, Edward has a number of other advantaging traits: He’s straight and is considered a man’s man. He’s into yachting and golfing, private clubs and cigars. He’s married and the father of two. He’s classically attractive, tall enough and has no obvious physical “defects”. He’s an Ivy grad (though not at the top of his class), was a business major, on the crew team and a member of a fraternity or secret society. His parents are both well-educated, and he grew up in a high-income household where his dad held a country club membership and his mom did charity work – all of which gives him significant contacts for sales and fundraising. Edward is Christian – either mainline protestant or Catholic, though not excessively devout. He owns his home (which he bought with a down payment from his parents), and while he sees his extended family on occasion, they’re not a regular part of his daily life.

Within the first thirty seconds of walking into the interview room, Edward has already pulled miles ahead of his competition, and though he would never admit it, he knows this. In fact, it is unlikely that few competitors to Edward even make it into the interview room. Since most jobs are filled through personal networks, Edward likely heard about the position and was able to secure a “the job is yours to lose” interview before it was even officially posted.

Now, of course, the job market is open to far more than Edward Executive. The idea behind a marketing profile such as this is that while virtually no one has all of these characteristics, the more one has in common with the ideal candidate, the more of a fit one will be perceived to be. This complex profile is not just operating in the background; including interviewer perceptions the moment the candidate walks in the door; it is equally at work in the screening process – whether on purpose (screening out ethnic-sounding names) or by mistake (assuming that candidates with Ivy degrees are better educated).

It is at work in decisions about where the job announcement is most likely to be posted, including being shared with friends who happen to be like us before being circulated more widely, and in the very design of the job profiles themselves. The list of requirements is often based on credentials (degrees, former job titles, certifications, etc.) rather than on actual capabilities. Likewise, “fit” is based on culture established by previous hires rather than a

reflection of who the company wants to be or what the emerging market looks like. When it comes to salary negotiation, the benchmark is likely the candidate's last salary, and jobs that require a strong personal network (sales and fundraising) are routinely priced higher than other equally, and sometimes more important jobs.

In all these areas, Edward has an advantage; the very infrastructure of the jobs market has been designed for him. So, any company that is serious about attracting and retaining diverse talent will need a new candidate profile, and once they have that, they will then need to determine how to create an employment infrastructure and environment that attracts that candidate and allows them to thrive. Which leads to “Wilma Worker”.

Wilma Worker

Wilma is, in many ways, Edward's demographic opposite. She's a woman, an ethnic minority, a single mother of three kids, and she's paying rent instead of a mortgage. Her household includes another adult family member – her mother – who helps raise the kids and take care of the house; given the long hours that Wilma works. Wilma started working in high school. She managed to graduate from a state university; accomplished through evening and weekend classes starting at the local junior college; all while working full-time. Wilma grew up in a low-income, but loving home, and though she has a very strong extended family network, none of them would have the discretionary wealth or income to allow her to succeed as a salesperson or fundraiser, or to gift her a down payment on a home.

Like Edward, she spends her entire life making investments, but instead of in a 401K, it's in people.



It was Steven Nieswander, the team's finance guru, who both came up with the idea of basing this composite on a real-life person, and who suggested that we name it Wilma; after real-life Wilma Jones; a woman who worked tirelessly for nearly thirty years to feed and offer love to thousands of Columbia University students. Steven saw Wilma almost every morning during his graduate school years, and this is how he described her:

“The Wilma I knew was the fry cook at the student cafeteria at Columbia University. She has begun each weekday for over 22 years at 5:00 AM in her apartment in the Bronx. She arrived on campus at 7:00 AM in order to prepare the ingredients for the omelets and make the batters for the cafeteria's pancakes and waffles. Once the dining hall opens, she is at the grill for the entire morning, making omelets and eggs. Wilma doesn't take a break the entire time she is at work, and her dedication shows in other ways. One year, she cut her hair in order to do her job better. “I

don't know if you've ever used a grill before," she would say, "But when I'm behind there, it gets hot. I kept getting sweat and oils dripping down into my face when I had hair, so I decided it was time to cut it off." She received an outpouring of sympathy from students who thought she was suffering from cancer. "I'm not sick," Wilma would say, "I'm just hot!"

Wilma doesn't have children of her own. She says she doesn't have time for them. "What would I do with kids, with all these that I have here," referring to all us students. "I'm like Old Mother Hubbard." On her twentieth anniversary, the university honored Wilma by naming her grilling station "Wilma's Grill" and erecting a large golden sign above her. I got to know Wilma really well over my time at Columbia and told many friends about her legendary grilling station. One Thanksgiving, Wilma realized I didn't have anywhere to go for dinner. She invited me to join her family at her house. It was for sure one of the most memorable and delicious Thanksgiving meals I've ever had. Though I was not African American and had just met everyone except Wilma, they made me feel like I was part of the family.

We ate at her sister's apartment at a large government housing complex in Queens. Wilma has helped her sister support her twin teenage sons since Wilma's sister's husband walked out. The twins would often spend afternoons and weekends with Wilma, since she went to work early in the morning and was home around the time the boys got out of school. Also in attendance was Wilma's brother, a recovering alcoholic who demanded a good share of Wilma's patience, time, and no doubt money as well.

When I arrived Thanksgiving day, it was clear that Wilma and her sister had been cooking for days. The counters, kitchen table, and all available surfaces in the living room were lined with aluminum heating trays fueled by flaming Sterno containers, or domed-up plates of desserts. There was fish, ham, chicken, and, of course, turkey. There were vegetables galore and pumpkin, sweet potato, and apple pie, along with all kinds of cookies. We sat together, eating, saying what we were thankful for, and laughed a lot. It was a wonderful day, and it was amazing to me how far Wilma and her sister made their modest incomes go to making a truly bountiful evening."

So much of the dedication, work ethic, and most importantly, heart that is so eloquently captured here in this recollection of real-life Wilma holds true for so many Wilma Workers out there; the true heart and soul of so many businesses. Like Edward Executive, not every Wilma Worker is an ethnic minority, or even female. This profile could easily have been named "Willis Worker". It could represent a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, a person with something we'd normally consider a disability, a follower of a different religion, someone who never attended university (public or otherwise), any person from a low-income background, or with a conviction on their record. It could be an introvert, a left-hander, someone with an unusual body type, someone who speaks English as a second language, or myriad other ways one might deviate from the norm. That one might be diverse.

Both the research showing how third parties can predict, with startling accuracy, whether a person will be offered a job by watching the first thirty seconds of an interview, and evidence of how gender bias is all but eradicated in blind orchestra auditions teach us two things – first, that our employment structure, with respect to who it was – and was not – built for, is riddled with inequity, and second, that addressing it, implementing fairer processes, is challenging, but worth the effort. We can do better. We can become aware of the ways we're unwittingly perpetuating bias, and in the process, validating it. We can recognize how it's been embedded in our infrastructure. And, perhaps most importantly, we can do the work to realign our

infrastructure to reflect our values. In doing so, we not only live up to our virtues; we create a corporate environment where everyone, from Edward to Wilma, can thrive.

Truths that Set Us Free

The good news in all this is we're living in a time when, for more of us than ever before, getting this right is more important than ever. This kind of unprecedented impassioned engagement is exactly what it takes for any society to successfully tackle big problems. But it's also here at this pivotal point that things can veer off course. Much of that's due to the inner conflict between our desire for change and our investment in the way things are. We understand the problem; how no society that functions by marking a segment of that society for exploitation is sustainable. But at the same time, because of where we're anchored, wins for others can feel like losses for us. In *This Land Is Your Land*, I describe the power of anchoring this way:

"Let's say someone promised to give you \$100 on your birthday, then you open the envelope to find \$1,000 instead. You'd be ecstatic; amazed by this generous gift. Conversely, let's assume that you'd misheard the person and thought they'd hinted at a lavish gift of \$10,000. On your birthday, you'd be disappointed to open the envelope and find a measly \$1,000. With anchoring, we attach meaning not to an actual outcome (the dollar amount, in both cases, is the same), but to an expected one; where we'd conceptually "anchored" ourselves."

Anchoring is why, though straight-identifying Anglos still dominate representation in films and television, it sometimes feels like all the LGBTQ+ and BIPOC characters are squeezing them out. They're actually not. It's no one's fault. But recognizing this – that each of us has implicit biases baked into fundamental concepts like our understanding of fairness – is an essential precondition for making anything better. It's what Dr. Mahzarin Banaji was speaking to when trying to explain how most white-identifying people (including many who consider themselves anti-racist), and half of all African Americans who took her and Dr. Elizabeth Phelps' implicit bias test could harbor unconscious negative biases toward dark-skinned faces.

"I am a woman," she explains. "I have worked outside the home all my life, and yet, when I take a test that requires me to associate female with career and male with home, I can't seem to do that as well; as if you gave me the opposite. If you asked me to associate female with home and male with career, that turns out to be relatively easy for my brain to do. Why? I don't have this belief that women don't belong in the workplace or anything like that, and yet, my brain contains the thumbprint of the culture in which I live, and that culture has repeatedly associated female and home, more so than male in home, and that's now in my head."

So, how do we get past this? In *The Matrix*, Neo, in an encounter with a child mystic, was told, "Do not try and bend the spoon. That's impossible. Instead... only try to realize the truth." "What truth?" Neo asked. "There is no spoon," the boy answered. "Then you'll see that it's not the spoon that bends; it is only yourself." In other words, if we truly want to be places where diversity lives, we're the ones who need to bend. We must take it upon ourselves to transform our spaces into ones where it can live. Recognition of our own implicit biases is one example of a truth that, by admitting it, empowers us to make a different choice. It sets us free.

But there are others: First, we can't be part of making things better without owning how we've benefitted from the way things are. This was the path of every slave owner turned abolitionist. There will be costs. Farms might be lost, friends might oppose you and your way of life will almost certainly have to change. But all that pales in comparison to the gains – what it will mean for the economy and for a society where everyone is

able to make their best contribution. Second, recognize that our superior position was tenuous from the start. In a diverse democracy, only a society that works for all of us will work for any of us. And, third, each of us is already far more diverse than we often admit. And that's a good thing. Because the same differences that were counted as demerits in the old structure will be assets in the new one.

The 13 Habits of “For All” Organizations

From congregations to police precincts, agribusiness to ecommerce, colleges to charities, entities of all kinds are increasingly doing this one thing – they're getting inclusion right. Though it looks different in different places, below are 13 habits they all share:

1. They are committed to closing the Access Gap.

If “in order to form a more perfect union” applies to individuals, it applies even more to the groups we create to pool our power. Organizations committed to inclusion understand that this is an all-or-none proposition and act accordingly. This is especially true when it comes to the essential ingredients of social vitality; a culture that embraces all of us, a democracy that empowers all of us, and an economy that enriches all of us. While we've made uneven progress on the first two, the third, whether manifest as slavery 200 years ago or as exploitation today, still perpetuates an economy that generates gains for some of us at the expense of the rest of us. Those practices are the primary driver of the Access Gap – the widening distance between the haves and the have-nots. Despite all our equivocating over the years, ending intergenerational poverty isn't impossible. In fact, if we're appropriately committed, we can help entire families escape poverty in just one generation.

When I was young, my grandmother, like much of the working class, made every one of our family's high-dollar purchases, from the refrigerator and washing machine to the family television and my first bike, all by reserving items, often at Sears, then making monthly payments until the item was paid in full. I remember overhearing a conversation between my grandmother, my grandfather, and my Aunt Naomi and Uncle Sid; all making sure they'd have the money to get my birthday gifts (a chemistry set and microscope) paid off on time. Starting in the 80s, however, just as credit card companies were inundating neighborhoods like ours with high-interest credit cards, retailers were phasing out layaway programs, which meant that the only way customers of limited means could make big-ticket purchases was either by putting them on a credit card or by utilizing the company's high-interest credit program. In the process, they'd shifted something that used to be a service into the revenue column. But in doing so, they also injected exploitation into their business models.

Then, there's credit reports, which came on the scene in the 90s and turned both consumer credit and mounting student loans into an instrument that does exactly what political strategist Lee Atwater said they were designed to do. He confessed how, in an era when it hurt segregationists to say “Nigger, Nigger, Nigger”, he and others came up with other ways to tilt things in their favor – tactics that hurt their victims more than they hurt them. Credit scores penalize the very same people who have been locked into jobs that they can never live on; people who, despite working, can never afford to pay everything on time, all the time. Additionally, the information itself is submitted by for-profit companies, none of which are legally accountable

for injurious, inaccurate information. Those reports are then sold by other for-profit companies who, though they call themselves “agencies”, are, in almost every case, publicly traded.

And all that’s before getting to what might be most problematic - most of what’s on credit scores isn’t actually credit. Which is also where efforts to address the instrument’s inherent problems by expanding its scope break down. Take Experian's Credit Boost, which seeks to capture even more private data, including things like cell phone payments and gym memberships, then make it public, and sell it to everyone from property owners to auto insurers. Instead of fixing the ways credit scores are broken, we’re productizing personal data even further, while the people generating that data neither have control of it, nor do they derive any financial benefit from it.

Fortunately, an increasing number of companies are offering credit non-contingent products, from Empower cash advance to [Dave](#) (which describes itself as a "banking app" and seeds new accounts with \$500) to [Sofi Invest](#). There are car dealerships that don’t require a credit check to get an auto loan, credit non-contingent credit cards, and a growing list of property owners who are foregoing credit checks for proof of ability to pay and references. Most of these companies are also helping to right-size the instrument by reporting only true credit transactions, not bills in dispute, early service termination fees and the like.

Then, there are all the ways we overcharge the poor. Entire sectors, from insurers to banks, from online retailers to toll roads, from cell phone services to ISPs, routinely charge those who can least afford it more for the same product, or charge them the same for an inferior product. For instance, retailer programs are structured to award discounts to those who can pay the membership fee but charge full price to those who can’t. Or, take Amazon, which offers free shipping to people who can afford a Prime membership. Companies like Amazon could make purchasing fairer to low-income customers by tracking shipping charges that would have been waived if they were Prime members, then awarding them a membership for the remainder of the year, once what they’ve paid in shipping charges supersedes membership cost.

De facto overpricing also shows up in everything from junk fees that target the poor, to pricing plans that effectively charge the poor more, and that almost every company uses. MightyCause is a platform explicitly and truly committed to doing good. The organization makes it possible for nonprofits and charities to raise funds they need to do the often thankless work they do. MightyCause offers a wonderful service that meets a very real need, and is driven by the best of intentions. But even organizations like this can unwittingly adopt pricing policies that result in the poor paying more. On the one hand, MightyCause offers two tiers of pricing - one for small organizations and the other for large organizations, which is great. But layered within that pricing structure is a penalty; they charge \$10 more per month if an organization pays each month, rather than an entire year in advance; in effect, charging poorer nonprofits - the ones most in need of raising funds - nearly 20% more for the exact same service.

Even grocers, by offering discounts on bulk purchases, but not offering a comparable loyalty rewards program, effectively charge the poor more, as do public transit systems that charge more for individual tickets than monthly passes, and that don’t award daily riders with free rides once their spend reaches the cost of a monthly pass. And this is before getting to practices like police departments targeting certain communities

for over-ticketing, or auto insurers using those issued tickets to justify charging higher rates to people who live in those communities.

Today, however, a vast and growing number of businesses are flipping the model; taking on the work to reverse this practice of finding ways to charge the poor more. Take farmers markets, where a growing number, recognizing that fresh produce is more expensive, offer two-for-one tokens for people using food stamps, or wellness service providers who offer discount rates for people who don't have insurance, or who are eligible for Medicaid or Medicare. There are companies like Winco, which both sell groceries at a discount and is employee-owned. There's everything from co-ops to credit unions, from marketplaces that offer discounts to seniors to buyer's clubs launched by members of working-class communities.

Or, take [the Soulfull Project](#). For every box of breakfast cereal sold, they donate a free box to help feed people. Their oatmeal, high quality and organic, is delicious and lives up to its name. But one of Soulfull's most stand-out features is the company's business model. First, they're not profiting off the poor - selling them a lower-quality product for the same price, or charging them more for a product of equal quality. Their product is priced the same as other comparable brands. Second, instead of absorbing all the profit, they're using some of it to share premium oatmeal with those who can't afford it. Below are five ways you and I can engage in helping to close the Access Gap:

A. Seeking out fair marketplaces – the most immediate way to impact poverty is via economic advocacy; consciously patronizing companies that don't exploit the poor (whether workers, customers or stakeholders) and avoiding those who do.

B. Standing in solidarity with those who rent their homes – those of us fortunate to have high credit scores and clean legal backgrounds can be allies for those who don't simply by looking to rent from property owners who don't use credit scores or background checks to deny people housing, or who don't charge fees simply to submit an application.

C. Making homeownership accessible to all – The average Euro American family has six times the household wealth of the average African American family. Almost all of this can be accounted for by one decision – whether those families are buying or renting their home; paying off their own mortgage or someone else's. Those of us with means can pressure mortgage lending agencies to offer better, fairer terms to people impacted by poverty, including those who could service a mortgage, but who are locked out of ownership by credit scores or the lack of a down payment.

D. Fight for adequate pay for all – We can urge every company where we have management authority, own shares or have influence to offer a Minimum Viable Income (MVI) to its lowest-paid worker, shifting the conversation from income disparity to income sufficiency. We can also support efforts to repeal laws that require immigration papers in order to get work and advocate for worker-earned equity at a rate that will allow everyone to retire.

E. Challenge our universities to find ways to offer debt-free education for lower-income students – No one should have to choose between getting an education and being saddled with crippling debt for the rest of one's career, or foregoing college and being disqualified for untold jobs. There are all kinds of creative ways this can be done, from requiring state legislators to write public colleges back into the budget to offering discounted and no tuition schooling for FAFSA-qualifying students, to awarding earned (instead of honorary) post-grad degrees based on bodies of work.

2. They believe everyone matters.

Though we don't often realize it, every policy our organizations adopt has the potential to impact real lives even when we're not thinking about those lives. We get how "Whites Only" signs did this. But it can happen in all kinds of other, far more subtle ways. My sister, Crystal shared with me an experience she had standing in line for a clinic that serves lower-income people. It was an unseasonably cold Northern California morning with temperatures in the 30s. She'd arrived early for her 8 AM appointment, as instructed, only to find other people, all of whom were sick, elderly or both, already waiting.

She noticed the lights on in the building and workers milling about, and a security guard was sitting inside the foyer on a stool. She knocked on the door and asked if they could unlock the door and allow people into the waiting room, given how cold it was. She was curtly informed that "security procedures" didn't allow that. She persisted, pointing out how this policy resulted in sick people being left out in the cold. "Look at this line," she said. "Do any of these people really look like a security threat?" They opened the doors. "Those who matter don't mind," the saying goes, "And those who mind don't matter."

There are all kinds of policies and ways of doing things that turn our organizations into places where diversity simply can't thrive. But because they're not explicitly *about* inclusion, we miss the connection. We don't see how using a job portal that sells personal data belonging primarily to lower-income applicants erodes trust between us and diverse stakeholders, but it does. They not only mind, but they matter. The key question here is "Who suffers for our gain?" Companies who are serious about inclusion recognize this and test every policy for unintended adverse impacts. Below are policies that aren't explicitly about exclusion, but that result in exclusion nevertheless:

A. Treating this work as an add-on – Inclusion is about a lot more than HR. It's a value, one that pervades every aspect of an organization's existence and impacts all of its stakeholders. "For All" organizations empower the person leading this work to assess everything from board composition to diversity in marketing, from practices that exploit minorities to who's awarded contracts, for inclusion consciousness.

B. Ducking accountability – Instead of using binding contracts (customers) and non-compete clauses (workers) to lock people into situations they'd rather leave, enact policies that engender loyalty and make this a place where workers want to work, customers want to patronize, and community members want to be associated with.

C. Us v. them politics – There's a distinct difference between criticizing our opponent's policies and rhetoric that galvanizes some of us by villainizing others of us. In a democracy, the same strategies that might win campaigns when one's group holds 90% of the vote will lose them at 50%. And perhaps even worse, those strategies engender longstanding resentment and result in retaliatory exclusion once that group loses majority power.

D. Financial favoritism – Treating customers and clients as if their human worth is determined by their economic status.

E. One for you, two for me – Examining policies governing the distribution of gains for inequality. Take music royalties generated by radio airplay. They go to the writer of the original lyrics and melody with nothing to the singer whose rendition made the song famous.

F. Shortsighted monopolization – Anti-competitive practices have two key adverse effects. First, while eliminating competition often results in gains in the short run, in the long run, it causes the market to atrophy. Second, eliminating

healthy competition might make us the only game in town, but it also breeds complacency, which diminishes effectiveness, tarnishes the company's reputation and leaves it vulnerable to disruption. It was cab companies' abysmal customer service (Seattle's Yellow Cab company, in 2014, had over 500 Yelp reviews and had an average 1.2-star rating), de facto monopolies, that made it so easy for the likes of Uber and Lyft to displace them.

G. Corporate bullying – Throwing our weight around comes in at least three key forms: 1. Enacting policies that require people or smaller companies to agree to detrimental deals in order to secure the contract or access a service, 2. Offering inferior products or services to customers who can't protest, and 3. Engaging in anti-union activities, including threatening workers, confiscating and destroying organizing materials, and withholding information about worker rights.

Societies are ever-changing, interconnected ecosystems. There really is a network of inescapable mutuality. That's why practices like segregation were always destined to fail – they split the foundation right down the middle. With each action, we're deciding whether we'll be a land that robs others of their dignity or honors them, one that impedes or embraces them. We're forming the society we and our children will have to live in. "For All" organizations recognize this and do the work necessary to become places where everyone belongs.

3. They actively identify and neutralize FINOPs (fair-in-name-only processes).

Years ago, I was invited to lead a workshop at a conference for educators. My chosen topic? *You're not Racist, but Your HR Policies Are*. I expected a turnout of between 5 and 15, so imagine my surprise when over 200 people signed up to attend. They had to move us to one of the largest rooms, and there I was, a couple minutes before starting, trying to rework my hands-on session into a presentation. Surprisingly, it went well. But what shocked me most was the freedom and authenticity with which people engaged.

Often, whenever conversations gear toward topics like racism and bigotry, things get tense and uncomfortable. But this conversation wasn't that way. People dove in frankly and honestly with the subject matter; something I think was possible because of the framing itself – I'd divorced them, as people committed to ending racism, from systems they weren't even aware of, but that were actually perpetuating it. And that made all the difference. The framing itself recognized them as the allies they were, rather than painting them as enemies. And likewise, it allowed them to recognize themselves as part of the solution, rather than being branded as the problem. We could then get to the *real* problem – a skewed and dysfunctional system.

The challenge of most instruments that we assume to be unbiased is that they are not. Nor can they be. Because the foundation on which they were built was already uneven, and in a fundamentally unequal system, the use of any tool that was not designed to account for such inequality is inherently discriminatory. In *This Land Is Your Land*, I call them FINOPs – fair-in-name-only processes, and give several examples, including firefighting requirements that are based solely on physical strength while neglecting things like knowledge of fire behavior or first aid, or the ability to work as a team; or, in sales, screening for an aggressive "go-getter" over someone adept at consultative selling; a skill that women and minorities have likely already mastered. The requirements we choose go a long way toward predetermining who will get the job.

Getting this right means revising or retiring any instrument that penalizes people for reasons other than ability to do the job, or that uses socioeconomic criteria to render people ineligible; including:

A. *“Get or Give”* – Many nonprofits expect board members to financially support the organization or have relationships from whom they can raise funds, hence the name. However, practices like these disqualify people who lack means or connections, but who could contribute to the nonprofit’s work in invaluable ways. A better policy, as we’ll see below under compensation practices, is for even nonprofits to pay board members.

B. *Credit Scores* – There are reasons why it’s increasingly illegal for companies to run a potential worker’s or board member’s credit. For one thing, it has nothing to do with whether that person will do a good job or is trustworthy. But more fundamentally, the primary reason people have low credit scores is because so many full-time jobs pay less than one can live on. About half of our full-time workforce earns less than \$15/hr. That’s \$600/wk, or \$2,500/mo, gross and \$2,300/net. Yet, rent alone for a one-bedroom to house a family of three (where the parent sleeps in the living room and the kids share the bedroom), in say, Seattle, is \$2,335; more than their entire take-home pay. That’s impossible math. Late payments on items that have nothing to do with credit are added to the report, which lowers their score and disqualifies them from everything from housing to reasonable rates on auto insurance.

C. *Reverse Robin Hood* – Car commercials, after quoting something like “Zero down and 0% APR” often include a caveat – “for very well qualified customers”. The higher one’s credit score, the more qualified they are. And since credit scores are indicators of poverty rather than negligence, we’re essentially awarding the lowest prices to the people who least need it and requiring those with the least to pay the most. Organizations can examine their policies to ensure that they’re not doing this; effectively charging the poor more so they can award discounts to the already wealthy.

D. *Background checks* – While the presence of content on a background check is an objective measure, the process behind the content isn’t. The amount of data revealing how our justice system is riddled with disparity is astounding. Studies show bias in everything from arrests to severity of charges filed, to convictions and sentencing, parole eligibility and whether one’s record can be sealed or expunged. There are multiple reasons for justice disparity, but almost all of it is tied to racial identity and economic status. This puts us in a tough position; one where having a record doesn’t mean we committed a crime and where not having one doesn’t mean we didn’t.

E. *Work Visas* – We’ve been told that the policies we’ve enacted that deprive undocumented immigrants of work opportunities are “for our own security”, but they’re not. These laws don’t lock all immigrants out of work; just working-class ones. Wealthy immigrants can rightfully work here in companies in which they’re significant investors and we make all manner of exceptions for people with knowledge or skills we deem rare and important. But just because we’re not aware of the powerful contributions each person can make doesn’t mean they’re not there.

F. *Watchwords* – There are phrases that, for certain classes of candidates, are more effective than separate water fountains during segregation. Religious entities that cite the need for candidates to sign an “honor code” informs LGBTQ+ people that they shouldn’t bother applying. Or, take “proven fundraising experience”. Perhaps nothing scares off exceptional nonprofit executives from low-income backgrounds more than that one phrase. Because they know they neither have the relationships nor the cultural knowledge, not to mention, the personality, to take that on. So, this person who would have been an amazing leader for the organization, with insights into the population that can only be gained by experience, will simply pass that posting by. Obviously, nonprofits need funds to continue doing the great work they do. But often, the people best suited to enable the nonprofit to fulfill its mission – its reason for existing – are hardly ever stellar fundraisers. And likewise, the people who are most likely to be rainmakers are often least likely to have deep understanding of how to fulfill the organization’s mission. A better approach? Make “willingness to engage in fundraising efforts” a requirement, then hire a fundraising professional to work alongside them.

But all this said, it’s not just about FINOPs themselves: it’s about the unconscious biases that lie beneath them, the unfair assumptions we make without even realizing that we’re making them. They’re why we think

that people with high college GPAs are the smartest, people with advanced degrees are the most qualified and that graduates of elite schools are the most prepared. None of which, in the real world, holds true. Wilma's public college business degree, paired with years of work experience, not to mention what getting that degree while working full-time says about her and all that she brings to the table with respect to relating across diversity might easily make her the better candidate.

And these biases have other ramifications. A key driver behind everything from police deaths to the hyper-monitoring of minority shoppers is the unfounded belief that simply being a minority makes them more dangerous. Or, take medical settings where multiple studies show that even African American cardiologists and oncologists take their African American patients' complaints less seriously, leading to higher fatality rates. Identifying and disarming both FINOPs and the biases that undergird them allows organizations to foster all kinds of relationships that make them stronger, more resilient and perpetually relevant.

4. They align both their messaging and actions with their aspirational values.

The amount of diversity in commercials - from interracial families selling air freshener, to same-sex couples shopping for automobiles; from exercise ads featuring people of every size, to sports ads that show all kinds of athletes, including those with limb differences - has radically increased since 2020. This alone sends clear signals that "all are welcome here". But commercials do so much more than create demand for our products. Over the years, they've emerged as the way we Americans signal what's normal, unremarkable and commonplace. Each time, whether in media or in real life, we see a person doing something that challenges stereotypes we likely didn't even know we held, it moves us a bit closer to jettisoning them.

So, every time we encounter a cookware ad with an African American male chef, or when people in wheelchairs are shown doing everyday things like shopping or shooting baskets, when trans people are cast as hotel staff or baristas, or when women of all sizes and complexions are featured in upscale clothing and beauty ads, we automatically update our social software. In the end, this heightened consciousness around representation does more than make our society better; it makes our culture more inclusive. And in the diverse society we're rapidly becoming, the more inclusive we are, the stronger we'll be.

Likewise, in our companies. If we're having trouble attracting diversity, if our customers aren't our biggest fans, if our nonprofit clients don't feel valued and respected, or if anyone doesn't feel included and embraced, one key place to look is at our messaging, verbal and otherwise. If diverse customers aren't even aware that we want their business, and diverse candidates aren't aware of openings at our organizations, we'll never even get the opportunity to speak with them, let alone recruit them or win their patronage.

But as we saw with commercials, what we say is only one part of messaging. There's also what they see. Representation is about visual inclusion; who's present, or, just as importantly, isn't. Who we include is another way of indicating who's not included. The photos on our website and brochures, our packaging and advertising tell them about whether their particular kind of diversity - from ancestry to sexuality to disability - is welcome in our space. Still, none of this will matter if our messaging, whether verbal or visual, doesn't reflect in our actions. Getting this right means doing seven things:

A. Facing the facts - "You can't fool all the people all the time." If our spaces really aren't places where all are welcome,

no amount of spin will convince people otherwise, at least not for long. Author Freeda Kapor Klein, in *Giving Notice: Why the Best and the Brightest Leave the Workplace and How You Can Help Them Stay*, details the real reasons so many diverse workers exit the back doors of their companies as fast as they enter the front. The primary culprit? A culture that, in vast numbers of ways, is hostile toward them.

B. Mending our ways – Our companies already have a reputation among diverse communities. If it's poor, then investing in marketing and spin is a waste of money. Instead, do the work of rebuilding trust. Governor George Wallace, after years of blatant racism, put in the hard work to rebuild trust with Alabama's black community. As a result, three years out of office, he'd win reelection with over 90% of the African American vote. He'd go on to appoint a record number of African Americans to state positions, including two cabinet members.

C. Making our intentions clear – If your company values diversity and is committed to treating people of diversity with respect, state it clearly in everything from web properties to job postings. Provide ways for diverse customers to tell you what you're doing wrong, and pay attention. Let job seekers know that the company is happy to provide alternative means of applying, and that, if needed, is willing to sponsor the right candidate for the job.

D. Creating workable workplaces – The *Mad Men* days, ones where the workplace is populated by married, heterosexual males with a wife who can run things on the home front, are over. Today's workforce requires that companies focus on flexibility, from role-splitting and sharing, to part-time and remote work, building in as much flexibility as possible. Take the idea of a [four-day work week](#). *Time* magazine named [4 Day Week Global](#), the nonprofit advocating for this shift, among its [100 most influential companies](#) of 2023.

E. Bringing apprenticeship back – Justin Timberlake isn't the only one who can bring good things back. Apprenticeships, bringing on people who might not have the necessary credentials yet, but who have personal qualities that are harder to find, is a powerful and inexpensive way to make your company accessible. It worked for William Lloyd Garrison, arguably the most influential voice in turning America's heart toward ending slavery. His press apprenticeship equipped him to launch *The Liberator*, the nation's most-read Abolitionist newspaper. Apprentices can be offered an "x-in-training" position with reduced pay until they gain the credential, and with the company covering the costs of them getting the credential. Doing so opens up the talent pool to people who are exceptional, but who are kept out because they don't have the economic means to secure certification, while reducing recruiting costs.

F. Making work available to everyone – With each position, determine whether it's work that can be done by a consultant, independent contractor or outsourced partner, in addition to hiring employees. Doing so opens up work to people who, due to documentation issues, can't find employment. Note this flexible status in the job profile and set compensation levels to cover expenses normally incurred by the employer.

G. Recognizing role relatedness – Though we often think otherwise, even disparate jobs share significant functional similarities; simply because they were designed to be done by humans. This holds true for kindergarten teachers and CEOs, chefs and scientists, garbage collectors and astronauts. Sure, specialized training and know-how is needed, but even that relies on the same fundamentally human capabilities. Linked In's Skills Genome expands our understanding even further, ignoring skills needed for most any job (e.g. Microsoft Office), and focusing on ones particular to that role (e.g. – database management). Even still, they found significant similarities, expressed as a score between 0 and 100. Take Food Servers. Even after weeding out general skills, it had the following skill overlaps: Customer Service Rep (71), Office Assistant (74), Camp Counselor (68), Teaching Aide (56), Marketing Asst. (53) and Childcare Provider (53).

Aretha Franklin, in her iconic rendering of Otis Redding's Respect, spelled the word out – R-E-S-P-E-C-T – then included an important qualifier – “Find out what it means to me”. In everything from policing to how we treat people in welfare offices, senior care facilities and upscale shops like the one Pretty Woman entered, we can examine our values and what our practices say about what those values really are. But it's not just about interpersonal interactions. We must examine the ramifications of say, a pharmacy's decision to no longer accept cash at a time when so many people lack access to debit cards. “For All” organizations readily take on the work involved in discerning what their lived values are, then making the changes necessary to align them with the ones they espouse.

5. They relentlessly look for ways they're unconsciously penalizing diversity.

In a 2017 *Forbes* article titled, *Employers Are Overlooking Non-traditional Candidates And It's Costing Them*, Austin Belcak explains how if you're turning down candidates due to their lack of “traditional” qualifications, you're likely missing out on your next top performer. He describes how candidates are acquiring comparable, and sometimes even better, skills from online, often free courses, and even by teaching themselves. “Candidates who attended a top 50 university, majored in your industry, graduated with a GPA above 3.5 (or even 3.0), and have some industry experience are cut from the same cloth,” he says. “They likely saw similar curricula and were taught the same ways of thinking and problem solving. When you have a problem to solve or a need to innovate, the ideas are coming from a similar perspective. Thus, your team is more likely to overlook errors or miss solutions that could potentially undermine your success.” I've seen this first-hand.

Back when I left the pastorate, I applied for a job at Big Brothers/Big Sisters. I brought to that work a number of unusual qualifications. First, I'm an ethnic minority who grew up in poverty and in government housing, which gave me lived experiences with the program's target demographic; “Littles” were non-Anglo, and almost all were from low-income households. Second, I'd both had mentors, and later, during my college years, been a mentor in a similar program. And, third, by then, I'd logged more than 5,000 hours providing pastoral counseling to successful professionals - the kinds of people most likely to be “Bigs” in the program. But in their screening process, none of that was discoverable or deemed particularly important.

At the time, BBBS had a rule that only people with a master's degree could be hired, and this, for a role that paid \$15,000 per year in the late 90s. My Master of Divinity meant that I was interviewed, then hired. However, I would turn out to be the only ethnic minority working in a program where most children were ethnic minorities, and I was the only person from a low-income background. Even back then, I was aware of all the people who would have been incredible in that position, but who would never get the chance.

Job platform, Jobrapido, on their website, boldly asserts that “98% of applicants are unqualified for the job opening”. But that's because of how we've defined “qualified”. We've been told that we need the “most qualified” candidate, which means that, like the Hunger Games (“May the odds forever be in your favor”), we're fixated on comparing candidates to one another, rather than to the job. We're constantly searching the haystack for a needle. But instead of the “most” qualified, what we really need is the “first” qualified. Sure, 98% of applicants won't be Katniss, the Mockingjay. But even Katniss herself succeeded by using different skills and doing different things than people who'd been groomed their entire lives to win. In the world of the *Hunger Games*, this “most qualified” approach never saw her coming.

In the real world, a significant portion of the people applying for a given job could successfully do that job on

day one, and a great number of others could, with a bit of training, get up to speed rather quickly and perform spectacularly. My sister, Josie, worked as a recruiter for a long-haul trucking company, but increasingly, they were having trouble finding drivers. At the same time, she saw all kinds of hard-working people from the low-income neighborhoods we grew up in who were looking for good-paying jobs. Back then, the company required the possession of a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) – something no one from our old neighborhood could afford to get. So, Josie suggested that they simply remove this requirement and turn it into a perk – the company would provide training and cover the fees associated with getting their CDL. All of a sudden, they were overrun with applicants, and before long, other trucking companies were taking a similar approach. Below are five steps we can take to stop penalizing diversity:

A. Freeing our minds – Recognize that it's not just about how that person fits the job but how the job must be altered to fit the person. Family farms, small businesses, and those in small towns do this all the time. Since different people can use different skills to do the same job, nothing substitutes for a conversation. The information exchange also allows the person doing the hiring to make adjustments to the role, allowing the hired person to focus on areas where their strengths are most needed.

B. Focusing on what's important – As we saw in Habit 4, the majority of critical capabilities needed to succeed are general, rather than specific, meaning that the same set of skills can equip one to do, or learn to do a vast variety of jobs. But if this is true, then we need to radically change what we're looking for. Start with a distilled list of things that are absolutely necessary. For instance, truckers don't need a CDL, but they do need to be able to pass a vision test. They need to be able to spend significant time alone. And they need to be reliable.

C. Building our own profiles – Both recycled job profiles written by others and those written, increasingly, by the likes of Chat GBT share common flaws. First, because they're both aggregates, we're building on the unconscious biases of previous profiles. Second, the organization doing the hiring is the world's foremost expert on what they need from the person they hire.

D. Looking under the hood – Ruthlessly examine each qualification for who it disqualifies, whether people with disabilities (while a visually impaired person can't be a trucker, they could be a dispatcher), who didn't graduate college, who are neurodiverse (including dyslexia and ADHD), who can't afford to secure a certain credential or hire a resume writer, can't work full-time or who are nontraditionally intelligent.

E. Treating all candidates with dignity – They're not appealing to us for a job, they're considering us as a work partner. Are people treated respectfully, as if we'd be lucky to have them, or disrespectfully, as if we're doing them a favor simply by acknowledging them? Are they kept updated? Is our tone considerate or haughty? Do we use their chosen name, pronouns and titles? Are we committed to responding personally, promptly and respectfully to each person who makes a good faith effort to apply and to finding ways to foster an ongoing relationship with them?

In the film, *Taken*, Liam Neeson's character, when talking to the men who'd kidnapped his daughter, stated that he had "a particular set of skills". And he did. But those skills were neither in kidnapping nor recovery. They were adjacent rather than linear, a toolbox that could be applied to all manner of unusual situations. Like getting his daughter back. My friend Steven has worked as a house manager for a wealthy elderly couple for nearly 35 years. Over that time, other employees have come and gone: Some of them were fired; others, quit. But Steven is still with them and as they approach their 90s, they both rely on and appreciate him more than ever. Likewise, their children, all Steven's age, are amazed at the deftness with which he does his increasingly challenging job and believe him to be practically indispensable. And he is.

But back when Steven was hired, he was in his 20s. He had one semester of college and no linear experience in a job like this. But Steven's "particular set of skills" included other things. His years working in restaurants

made him adept at dealing with customers. His natural intelligence meant that he could quickly solve all manner of problems. His even-tempered nature allows him to be both flexible and direct as needed. And he is, and always has been, absolutely trustworthy. It's Steven's personal qualities, his humanness, that would make him invaluable to his employers and, no doubt, one of the best hires they've ever made.

6. They engage in disruptive enlistment.

We've all been cautioned about lemons, cars that look great on the outside, but that implode as soon as we drive them off the lot. If we're not diligent about the enlistment practices we adopt, our organizations end up broken down on the side of the road. Likewise, companies often put great effort into acquiring customers but give significantly less into keeping them. But when we use underhanded tricks to lock people into doing business with us or when we fail in customer service (or, even worse, when we do both), we foster resentment, inspire people to speak negatively about us and all but ensure that those same people will never patronize us again.

Or take worker recruitment. We can, for instance, state in job postings that "Diverse candidates are strongly encouraged to apply," but then turn applying into such an onerous process that those candidates opt-out. That's because, for them, it's a numbers game. A [2017 Harvard Business School report](#) revealed that companies are more than twice as likely to call ethnic minority applicants for interviews if they submitted resumes that kept all factual content the same, but deleted information that indicated their racial identity.

A [second 2017 Harvard Business School report](#) revealed that since 1990, white-presenting applicants have historically received 36% more callbacks than black-presenting applicants and 24% more callbacks than Latinx applicants with identical résumés. Other research suggests that minority candidates must respond to [50% more job listings](#) to receive the same number of replies as Anglo candidates; even when the candidates are comparably qualified. Minority applicants already know that they've got to apply for more jobs to get a response, so the more hoops we require and unnecessary qualifications we list, the more likely they're going to bypass our announcement, and the fewer diverse candidates we get.

"For All" organizations treat recruitment as the starting point of a long-term relationship and treat employment itself as a partnership. They get that these same people applying for jobs will shape their reputation out in the world. They're potential customers, clients and patrons, ones who could choose to support us when we need it most. And if we treat them as if they matter, putting effort into fostering a sense of community among our stakeholders and genuinely inviting them into it, they could be among our strongest advocates and our most potent recruitment tool. Below are five key ways we can improve how recruitment works:

A. Make applying easy for them, not us – When it comes to application process dropout, an Indeed survey found that the typical large company loses 9 out of 10 qualified applicants to unwieldy processes. But they don't have to. Turns out, one of the best application methods is also the simplest – and the cheapest – email. Simply setting up a special email address for that position allows candidates to submit resumes, cover letters and other materials with no registrations no passwords, no nothing. Stop requiring people to create an entire profile just to submit a resume or demanding references or transcripts, etc., ahead of time.

Minority candidates will almost always have less impressive references and, given the ways we've abused it, will be rightfully hesitant to hand over confidential information about others before it's absolutely necessary to do so. Instead of asking them about their salary expectations, make the pay scale, hours and other details of the position transparent.

Remove barriers that make it difficult for diverse candidates, those with disabilities, learning differences, or who are in need of some form of accommodation to reach us.

B. Employ small-batch processing – Set a small-batch number between 1 and 5. Once the designated number of candidates apply, pause the listing until those can be reviewed. If none of the applicants meet the minimum qualifications, reactivate the posting and repeat. Small-batch processing acts as a digital version of taking the “help wanted” sign out of the window and applying. It discourages companies from collecting hundreds or thousands of applications, which makes it all but impossible to give them due consideration and means that most submissions go unanswered.

C. Treat their privacy as a fundamental right – There are several ways we can put stringent privacy protocols in place, including not requiring sensitive information at the onset, eliminating portal registrations, committing to, and plainly stating that we won’t be party to selling or sharing their personal information, encrypting their data and expunging information about candidates we don’t advance. End practices like searching for a candidate’s social media footprint (minorities are increasingly opting out in order to make discrimination less easy, and if they’re at all involved in social activism, to avoid being tracked by pre-crime software).

D. Recognize that diversity is about far more than racial identity – Portentia Workforce specializes in placements of neurodiverse candidates (conditions ranging from dyslexia and ADHD to OCD and epilepsy, mania, depression, schizophrenia, dyslexia and across the autism spectrum); a group that, according to their research, represents 1/4th of today’s workforce. Portentia, through their work, opens our eyes to yet another way we’re overlooking immensely talented contributors

E. Respect their identity – Candidates should be able to use the name they’ve chosen for themselves on application materials, instead of legal name, along with the gender pronouns that describe them. This makes the process respectful toward a variety of candidates including LGBTQ+, gender expansive, and those who’ve simply chosen a different name – one that’s easier to spell or pronounce, or that doesn’t necessarily convey things they’d like to initially keep private, like their ethnicity, ancestry or religion.

“For All” organizations make it a habit to examine what every aspect of the enlistment process might feel like for diverse candidates, and what those practices unintentionally say about whether their company values them. This might mean everything from making it possible for those who are not looking for a full-time role to become a member of the team to going to where they are to recruit. After making a commitment to hire more LGBT officers, the SFPD set up recruitment tables outside gay bars in the Castro, ironically, the same kinds of places, prior to Stonewall, they’d been raiding.

7. They look for potential partners, not workers.

The Pastry Project is just one example of how it’s possible to teach people with no expertise whatsoever in a specialized trade, to master it. In their case, the nonprofit trains people to become professional bakers. Imagine how they would describe the skills or capabilities they consider to be absolutely essential. Or, there’s my friend, Dieter, who, at one time, was one of the most famous celebrity ministers/musicians in the country. Dieter led his high school team to state finals in soccer and was, like me, a marathoner. He’d go on to found and lead a church that thousands attended each Sunday and was an Elton John-caliber pianist. Then, in 2008, Dieter had a stroke one night in his sleep; one that left him unable to speak, and paralyzed on his right side. He’s right-handed.

Dieter went from top of his game to having to learn to walk and talk all over again. The only job he could get was as a crossing guard. Then, a friend who was a manager at a Bay Area Trader Joe’s hired Dieter. At the

time, he could barely walk and had a ready vocabulary of perhaps 20 words. But this manager believed in Dieter and knew that he had much to offer. And Dieter did. He would prove himself to be one of the hardest workers this manager had ever hired. He'd take on tasks that others felt were beneath them – everything from cleaning up spills to unclogging toilets. But even more profound was his impact on the work environment. Everyone loved working with Dieter, and he found himself being as much of a pastor to his fellow Trader Joe's co-workers as he'd been to his congregation.

People came to him to talk about their problems and to get moral support. They looked to him and were inspired by his indomitable positive attitude. And that made that Trader Joe's much more than a place to work, but both a community and a family. When Dieter opted to move back to Portland, his hometown, during his father's final years, the store manager called the Trader Joe's in Portland and told them they'd be nuts not to hire Dieter. He got offers from every Portland location. When he got married a few years ago, it looked to me like every person from the store where Dieter worked was present at the reception, and a number of them drove up from the Bay Area.

Then, there's the same-sex, interracial veteran couple in New York City, both of whom were wounded while serving, who launched their own four-table restaurant, publicized entirely by word-of-mouth, out of their home. The Euro-American partner, who'd lost the use of his legs, was the chef, whereas the African American partner, who'd been blinded, was combination host, server, and entertainer (he'd play the piano, sing and interact with dinner guests after the food had been served). And there's the SF Bay Area Asian American soccer mom, who, despite lacking arms, does everything any other mother does, including driving, grocery shopping and actually coaching the soccer team (she's an extraordinary soccer player).

As we saw with Edward and Wilma, there is any number of ways we can unconsciously bias even processes we believe to be objective. The key discipline here is self-awareness; recognizing that what we create is almost certainly biased, and committing to making it less biased, in the same way that the union we the people have formed is imperfect, but that we're committed to making it more perfect. Below are five ways we can do this:

A. Walk back ever-escalating complexity - Eliminate the need for professionals who specialize in search optimizing one's resume, or wording it in ways that make it past screening algorithms. We think they're saving us time, but what they're really doing is overlooking great contributors. A Hodes' Healthcare study that had mystery job candidates submit "perfect resumes" found that only 12% of these "ideal candidates" actually received a call-back. And that's before getting to the role discrimination played in obscuring the hiring process in the first place.

The reason we ended up needing Affirmative Action laws was because of how we'd used FINOPs to "hurt them more than it hurts us". Take entrance exams, which skew heavily in favor of families who can afford to pay for test prep, or ones able to send their kids to schools that explicitly prepare them for such tests. The only way to level the playing field is to provide comparable test prep to everyone. Or, we could forgo entrance exams altogether, as a growing number of schools are doing.

B. Recognize that, by and large, interviews don't work – Multiple studies reveal that, from hourly employees to CEOs, the new hire failure rate ranges between 50 and 82 percent. That's astounding. Even at its absolute best, the process is no more effective than tossing a coin. Interviews are poor predictors of performance for a number of reasons; first,

we're hiring for something that hasn't happened yet, and predicting the future, under any circumstances, is difficult. But just as importantly, the qualities that make for a good interviewee have little in common with those that make one an invaluable team member. Some organizations are shifting toward things like situational interviews (requiring candidates to react to work-related scenarios) and "job auditions" in hopes of making the process more effective.

And evidence suggests that they do, in fact, help reduce the degree to which our personal biases skew the process. But by creating even more distance between people, they fall prey to an equally significant problem; they focus us even more so on candidates who audition well, or who can perform that one task spectacularly while we overlook outstanding people who simply don't perform well in contrived settings, or who have a whole range of other invaluable skills we can only discover by listening to them.

C. Stop treating the process like it's the Hunger Games – First, quit holding out for the "most" qualified. Give the first people who meet your most basic requirements a valid listen. Second, talk to people. Build in ways that candidates themselves can take the lead – letting them tell us who they are and about the contributions their diversity enables them to bring – ones we never would have thought to even assess for. Instead of superstar strengths, look for ways they can make the team stronger and more effective. Third, recognize that you're not just choosing them, they're choosing you. Give them reasons to do so.

D. Put our empathy to work – Use the ways in which we ourselves are diverse to sensitize us to the process – i.e. – what would it take to set us immediately at ease if we were interviewing, and just as importantly, what would cause us anxiety? Put yourself in their shoes. What would it be like to be a Muslim woman interviewed by a panel of suited Anglo men? Can an introvert or someone with a stutter be made comfortable and set at ease? Ask yourself, "Is our process assessing their capabilities or their ability to answer interview questions?" Practical steps would be letting people know beforehand the kinds of topics the conversation will cover so that the process is less of a pop quiz, and steering clear of questions that require culturally nuanced answers like, "What's your biggest shortcoming?"

E. Recognize how an interviewer's own personal assumptions can skew interview outcomes and counteract them. – Given that we're naturally drawn to people with whom we find affinity, it falls to us, not them, to build those bridges and find those points of human connection with everyone. We can easily gravitate toward people we find it effortless to talk with simply because the many things we have in common. We might not be able to jettison all our biases and assumptions, but we can learn to be aware of them, and by doing so, counteract them.

The thing is, even if we're actively working to embrace diversity, we have blind spots. Without ever intending to, we can do things or adopt processes that dismiss unconventional, but also outstanding candidates. Even the interview format, one for which Edward has been groomed his whole life, but that's new to Wilma, is a factor; from the questions we ask to our unacknowledged expectation that they should be able to speak our cultural language. The goals of this work are twofold: 1. Identify people who can make the organization stronger, and, 2. Become the kind of organization where they want to stay.

8. They think in terms of "Human Resourcing", not "Human Resources".

24-year-old D'Monterrio Gibson, a uniformed Fed Ex worker, was shot at by two white-identifying men while delivering packages. Management not only neglected to immediately involve the police, but they also placed D'Monterrio on the same route the next day. When he refused, he was placed on unpaid leave. Though the company would make moves to rectify the situation (including moving D'Monterrio from unpaid to paid leave), the initial people services lapses are huge enough to drive a Fed Ex truck through.

Most companies approach HR with a production mentality. The mindset, a holdover from plantation days, still treats people as instruments, hands to pick the cotton, or, in manufacturing, expecting people to be grateful for having a job at all. After all, beggars can't be choosers. And while that might have been true at one time, that's no longer the workplace or the workforce we have today. Even the name "Human Resources" speaks to how we see people; as things, not unlike the depreciation of aging slaves.

"For All" organizations take an entirely different approach to every aspect of the talent pipeline, from recruitment to retirement. Becoming places that attract and retain diversity will mean rethinking all aspects of HR – including its name – and its impact on human lives. Below are six specific areas of consideration:

A. Job design – Incorporate creativity into how each role is envisioned, recognizing how the same role can be adjusted for, say, an Assistant Director, Director, or Senior Director; which expands the talent pool. Similarly, planning for how the duties can be divided (role-splitting) or broken into two part-time positions (role-sharing) opens up the field to the vast number of candidates whose life circumstances don't allow them to work 50+ hours-per week, including single parents, seniors, students and people with medical disabilities. Make flexibility the norm. Structure every role to allow everything from being able to pick up the kids from school, then finish work at home, shift hours to the weekend, compress schedules and work remotely as much as the role allows.

B. Individual Well-being – Prioritizing wellness starts with recognizing that almost everyone will face a serious emotional or psychological crisis at some point in their career and that when it happens, its severity can be significantly increased or decreased by our work environment, and whether going through this is normalized or stigmatized. Those are the moments when we lose great people or keep them. But it's not just about employees. A 2018 American Psychological Association analysis found that the estimated cost of job stress nationwide may be as much as \$187 billion, with 70% to 90% of those losses resulting from declines in productivity.

C. Personal Development – We talk a lot about professional development. But in reality, anything that enriches a person's well-being will have a spillover effect at work. Taking dancing improves their health, elevates their mood and expands their network. A film class makes them a better storyteller and enables them to give invaluable feedback on the company's advertising and communication efforts. And so forth.

D. Life change adjustments – A not-insubstantial amount of turnover occurs due to changes in team members' home lives. Anything from needing to spend more time with the children to caring for an aging parent, from going back to school to needing more personal life balance, can trigger a need to downshift to a lower-level position, move to consultant/advisor status or to less-than-full-time status. Companies structured to help people resolve these inevitable conflicts engender loyalty and keep great people longer.

E. Performance Appraisals – Something fundamentally shifts when workers become co-owners. They're now personally invested in the company's success, which impacts everything from the effort people put in, to our willingness to do things that aren't explicitly our job. The same thing happens in nonprofits when employees are folded into the governance structure and represented on the board and its committees. In this environment, supervisors are transformed into facilitators – people tasked with helping each team member to bring their best to the work and to have the things they need. Feedback becomes both routine and constructive, a way of helping people do the thing they already want to do anyway. Because the hierarchy has been flattened, everyone has a voice, and because feedback has been decoupled from compensation, the conversations can be focused on one thing – improving organizational performance.

F. Transitions – There are all manner of reasons why people might need to leave, from school to family, from life transitions to personal pursuits. As much as possible, become a place they'll miss and a community they'll want to remain part of. Organizations that work to engender loyalty also have strong boomerang employee rates – people who circle back to them – and they're able to spread the word about jobs far faster and more extensively. Even when the separation is employer-initiated, in many cases, it's about fit, not fault. Most shortcomings can be corrected with timely, constructive feedback; both from us to them, and just as importantly, them to us. Our efforts over recent years to reform policing provide us with ample evidence that infusing more humanity into our processes works.

9. They create a culture that people want to be part of.

Margaret Heffernan, in a TED Talk titled, *Forget the Pecking Order at Work*, references research conducted by evolutionary biologist William Muir, who, in an experiment, created two groups of chickens - one with a variety of hens, ranging from below-average to above-average in egg-laying capabilities, and another with only those with the highest egg-laying capabilities, described as "Super Chickens". On every measure, from egg-laying to the well-being of the chickens themselves, the former outperformed the latter. In fact, of the large Super Chicken flock, only three were still alive at the end of the study. All others had been pecked to death.

The research teaches us at least three important lessons: First, super chickens and their human counterparts have been primed to function the same way – to achieve their success by suppressing the productivity of others. When the thing that matters is individual performance, the most likely results are, according to Margaret Heffernan, "aggression, dysfunction and waste". This was supported by a 2010 MIT study which showed that a group's "collective intelligence" correlated neither with the individual with the highest IQ nor with groups with the highest aggregate IQ. Turns out, the groups that were the most effective problem-solvers, the most productive and creative had three things in common; they were high in social sensitivity, they were rich in diversity, and they functioned in a manner where all participated and everyone mattered. But this is neither the culture that most companies foster nor is it a consideration in staffing decisions.

It was in 1997 that McKinsey and Company declared what the consulting firm called a "[War for Talent](#)", advising companies to shift their recruiting focus from team players and personal traits like loyalty, to "the best and the brightest." This declaration was, in many ways, an affirmation of so called "rank and yank" policies originated by people like Jack Welch, Chairman and CEO of General Electric in the 80s, and that would become increasingly popular across corporate America. In GE's case, Welch ranked all managers, then fired whoever was among the bottom 10% – irrespective of their absolute performance, and with no regard for their commitment to the company, their contributions to overall company success, etc.

And that's before getting to the abject subjectivity of the rankings themselves. For Welch, "A" players were perceived by their supervisors to be filled with passion, open to ideas from anywhere, blessed with much "runway" ahead of them, and that they possessed charisma and a number of other extroverted traits. McKinsey suggested that companies should take a similar approach; investing in "A" players, developing "B" players, and moving quickly to get rid of "C" players. It soon became clear, however, that this approach was disastrous; derailing productivity and poisoning company culture. And not unlike with clusters of super chickens, the damage was almost fatal. This is but one of many ways our organizational cultures can become toxic – places where people are both less productive and don't want to stay. Others include:

A. Lack of diversity among decision-makers – It’s not enough to have diverse customers or workers in the breakroom. The diversity present in the broader community must also be represented in the executive suite and the boardroom, among focus group members and shareholders. And that’s not just for their sake, it’s for ours. Because barring them from the table means that the vital insights they hold are also missing. But even when diversity is present, it can be effectively muted by a culture that forces conformity at the expense of creativity. A better approach is focusing on what could be called “crowd intelligence”, which, like crowdfunding aggregates and integrates contributions from all kinds of sources to achieve goals that aren’t reachable through traditional means.

B. Not listening – Most companies, if they were paying attention, would have plenty of warning with respect to the kinds of crises that could sink them. It starts in vulnerable places like among underrepresented workers or lower-income customers, before spreading everywhere. The key is simple; create safe forums for them to tell us what’s not working. Engagement surveys with items like, “I feel valued and respected”, “Everyone is treated fairly here”, or “My voice is heard”, would have provided vital information long before the problem grew unmanageable. Hospitals that want to become places that serve everyone well should survey those on the margins – people with Medicaid, who are ethnic minority or LGBTQ+, or some combination thereof.

C. Not caring – a lack of regard for the wellbeing of the people who make our existence possible; from the workers who make us great and their families, the people who give their lives meaning, to the customers who choose us and the communities who believe in us. CSR (corporate social responsibility) isn’t just about the world; it’s about us. Companies that take it seriously are stronger, more sustainable, and are far better at attracting and retaining diversity.

D. HI-PO mentality – Inherent in the assumption that certain people are “high potential” is the belief that most others are not. As early as grade school, we’re already declaring some kids “gifted” and others not. But just because we can’t see their potential or recognize their gifting doesn’t mean it’s not there. Everyone achieves better when those around them believe in them.

E. Unspoken work demands – expecting salaried workers to work more than full-time, including evenings and weekends, discouraging workers from taking vacations, and offering things like paid leave, but penalizing anyone who utilizes them.

F. Authoritarian environments – requiring stringent adherence to rank and titles, including who can make a suggestion, give feedback or express their opinion. Punishing workers who blow the whistle, report harassment, seek to unionize or simply “forget their place”. Behaviors that short-circuit dialogue and, as a result, eliminate productive problem-solving.

G. Social dysfunction – allowing micro-aggressions, subtle harassment, disrespect, personal attacks, and casual verbal violence, then accusing people of being “too sensitive” when they bring it to our attention. Enron executives, believing themselves to be above accountability, gave their gaming strategies cocky names. Death Star and Load Shift both involved creating the appearance of congestion on California’s power grid, then arranging for the state to pay Enron to relieve the congestion.

Bottom line, we’ll need to assess our companies just as rigorously as we currently do with candidates, which is the only way we can identify whether the culture of our own “hen house” is one where everyone can thrive, and how their diversity can make us stronger and shore up places where we, as a collective, are weak.

10. They pay people sufficiently and fairly.

Significant attention has been given to soaring executive compensation, and to the growing distance between the highest-paid and lowest-paid workers in the company. And as important as this is (especially when executive comp is skyrocketing while those same companies insist that paying the bottom rung more would ruin them), wage disparity isn't the elephant in the room. It's wage insufficiency; full-time jobs that pay less than one can live on without outside help. Wage disparity is a relative measure. But wage insufficiency is an absolute measure; one that almost exclusively affects the working poor. Solving it is rather simple: Benchmark what it takes for a full-time worker, working no overtime, to live a modest, stable life without the added assistance of food banks, free clinics and the like. Set that as the salary for your company's lowest-paid worker. Then, build up from there.

Though it might seem counter-intuitive, paying people more and paying them fairly might be one of the best investments an organization can make. First, it engenders loyalty and reduces turnover, which also reduces the length of time positions are left vacant and the costs involved in filling them. Second, it enhances our reputation in the community, which makes recruiting easier. And third, it's a down payment on our own sustainability. Before the Great Depression, even as productivity rose, few manufacturers shared those gains with workers, which meant that few workers could afford to purchase the products they spent all day making. This led to a glut of automobiles and televisions, record players and refrigerators, which, in an economy that runs on consumer spending, would turn out to be devastating. Below are seven ways we can do better:

A. Establish a Minimum Viable Income (MVI) metric for the lowest-paid worker in your organization and pay them accordingly. Make that your compensation baseline. To give a sense of what, practically, this means, below is information pulled from MIT's living wage calculator indicating what it would take for a three-person (one adult, two children) household to sustainably subsist, unaided.

But before reviewing it, it's important to understand what's included in the calculation and what isn't. The instrument's creators describe it this way: *"In general, it is assumed that families select the lowest cost option that enables them to meet each of these basic needs at a minimum but adequate level. As such, the living wage does not budget for eating out at a restaurant or meals that aren't prepared at home; leisure time, holidays, or unpaid vacations; or savings, retirement, and other long-term financial investments."*

- Birmingham, AL - \$28.44/hour or \$59,165 before taxes/\$49,813 after taxes
- Fresno, CA - \$32.18/hour or \$66,944 before taxes/\$55,610 after taxes
- Louisville, KY - \$29.59/hour or \$61,548 before taxes/\$51,602 after taxes
- Boston, MA - \$38.18/hour or \$79,414 before taxes/\$69,692 after taxes
- Kansas City, MO - \$28.09/hour or \$58,427 before taxes/\$48,972 after taxes
- Portland, OR - \$35.53/hour or \$73,909 before taxes/\$60,523 after taxes
- Cheyenne, WY - \$30.44/hour or \$63,311 before taxes/\$55,561 after taxes

B. Make everyone co-owners – Award everyone, from lowest to highest paid, from employees to contractors and gig workers, equity that travels with them throughout their career and that's benchmarked to their salary. There are any number of ways to do this, from stock options to companies like Bob's Red Mill that have transitioned to employee-owned models, to 401Ks and 403Bs. Coffee giant Starbucks provides another powerful example of how employees can be included in company ownership. Founder Howard Schultz insisted on shared ownership from the company's inception, and in 1991, they began offering employees an ownership stake in the form of their board-managed program, "Bean Stock". Awarded to all Starbucks employees (or at Starbucks, "partners"), since inception, the program has

awarded over \$1.2 billion in shares to employees. In addition, they offer a 401(k) retirement plan that includes a generous company match, and they offer discounted company stock (S.I.P.).

C. Pay the board – compensating board members, even nonprofit boards, would expand the field of people who could add significantly to an organization’s effectiveness, but who cannot afford to divert hours away from work. People who don’t need it could simply request a \$1 salary or donate it back to the organization.

D. Eliminate the use of salary histories in setting salaries – Base compensation solely on current position and one’s ability to do the job. No one should be paid highly in this job because they were paid highly in the past. In theory, using salary history to determine pay for new positions seems reasonable, but practically, it advantages people who’ve had higher-paid roles. Then, over time, it exacerbates this wage disparity. Take two recent MBAs – one male and one female. Based just on gender alone, the female will make 60 – 70% of what the male is being paid; even if hired for the same position. Then, every time they change companies, their respective salary histories further widen the gap.

E. Abolish salary negotiations – Studies show that minorities and women are less comfortable negotiating for a higher salary. But they also shouldn’t need to be good at this. There is a fair rate of pay for the work, irrespective of past salaries, gender, ethnicity, sexuality or haggling skills.

F. Decouple pay and performance reviews – Today, promotions and year-end bonuses are often tied to reviews. But even the appraisal process is skewed, by the selection bias inherent in the metrics we focus on, by requiring that workers list their accomplishments (which is less of a measure of what they actually contributed and more of a measure of how well they can talk themselves up), and even simply by highlighting individual achievements (which competitive cultures tend to focus on), rather than contributions to collective success (the focus of cooperative cultures).

G. Abolish secret inequality – Social media software provider Buffer, in 2013, just two years into its existence made a number of radical decisions, including going fully remote (7 years before COVID) and adopting a standard of transparency, including with respect to compensation and how it’s determined. Since then, hundreds of companies have followed in their footsteps, using variations of their [salary calculator](#). Describing themselves as an “open” company, Buffer employees, across the board, are immensely satisfied with the approach.

But making a commitment to fair and sufficient pay is only the first step. Whatever process we adopt will need to be continually refined, weeding out the biases we have, but don’t even realize we carry. That means addressing everything from the practice of attaching higher salaries to male-dominated roles (like finance) and lower salaries to roles (like marketing) often filled by women; to ensuring that we’re setting fair rates of pay within verticals.

11. They offer ample, proportionate and equitable benefits.

Though we often don’t realize it, more than a third of our total effective income, at least for most of us, is delivered through benefits; whether vacation or workers comp, employer-paid taxes or retirement contributions, sick leave or holidays. Any company truly interested in promoting fairness could begin by analyzing which benefits are being used by whom, and how this translates into effective income. For instance, Edward, as an executive, is awarded all manner of perks that Wilma is not; everything from a company car to outplacement services. She makes a lesser salary but has to pay extra for things that Edward gets for free. Getting benefits right starts with identifying who we had in mind when the platform was built, and rethinking it so that it’s both equitable and inclusive of everyone. Below are seven ways we can do that:

A. Adopt a cafeteria approach – Chances are, Wilma can't, say, afford a pet, which means she won't be using the free pet insurance the company provides. But she could benefit from coverage of summer enrichment programs for her kids. A cafeteria structure that allocated certain dollar amounts to both Edward and Wilma that they could apply to the benefits that best serve them would better meet everyone's needs.

B. Adjust how insurances work – Most companies build their policies for Edward; fully covering his wife and children. But that disadvantages Wilma, who doesn't have a wife (so doesn't benefit from spousal coverage). She does, however, have a mother who lives with her and helps care for the kids. Wilma needs to pay an additional amount – out of her salary – to have a non-spousal family member covered by her insurance. Both Edward's additional benefit and Wilma's additional cost can easily result in an effective income difference of over \$1,500/mo for health insurance alone.

C. Make paid leave equitable – Companies are required by law to offer six weeks paid maternity leave, and today, many offer some form of paid paternity leave, including for adoptions. But there's no comparable provision for a single parent to care for the sick child they already have, or for a childless employee to care for aging parents, or for those who need paid personal leave for some other reason, including their own wellness. Should not a 60-year-old worker who will never be a candidate for maternity/paternity leave, or the 1 in 4 workers living in single-person households not have access to comparable benefits, ones that could both enhance their well-being and lengthen their tenure? This is especially important when we take into account the costs involved in bringing people on and the sheer amount of luck involved in finding the right people in the first place.

D. Provide proportionate benefits for part-time employees – Many companies only offer benefits to employees that pass a threshold of weekly hours worked, and until they pass that threshold, they're ineligible for all but the most basic benefits like workers' comp. Doing so allows employers to avoid providing benefits simply by limiting the number of full-time hires they make. So people being paid at or near minimum wage are forced to take two part-time jobs; neither of which provide them with ample benefits. Employers can make work fairer by prorating benefit payouts based on FTE (full-time equivalency). Employees working .25 FTE should be eligible for benefits comparable to hours worked.

E. Pay independent contractors, freelancers and gig workers more – In addition to health/life insurance, vacation, paid leave and retirement, employers cover everything from office space and utilities to equipment and supplies to furnishings, computers and cell phones for employees. But non-employee workers, which, for most tech companies, encompass half their workforce (not to mention ride-sharing companies and others whose entire business model relies on gig workers), are on their own, including covering workers' comp and disability, fully funding their own retirement and fully covering the portion of taxes like FICA and Social Security. An effective fairness lens requires that we pay these workers a premium to cover all the benefits they're not getting as employees.

F. Constantly recalibrate our offerings – Almost all low-wage workers could afford to service a mortgage if they could cover the down payment. They don't have elderly relatives who can provide such a huge sum, nor do their salaries allow them to save it. Homeownership assistance is but one example of how benefits could be tailored to support the workers who need it most. Personal holidays would allow religious minorities to take off for important occasions without using vacation time. NYC organizations routinely make discounted subway passes available to employees. And companies are increasingly offering DCFSA's (dependent care flexible spending accounts), which allow them to cover both childcare and eldercare. All four are examples of how we can recalibrate our benefits offerings to better fit employees' needs.

G. Make retirement possible – Every worker who spends a career working should be able to retire and live out the rest of their lives near the standard of living they had while working. But that's not the future for most of our workforce. In fact, the median retirement savings for all middle-income workers across the US is only \$60,000; approximately 5% of

what they need. And that's not the worst of it. Lower-income workers, who constitute nearly half the workforce, have no retirement savings at all. This, given aging Boomers and Xers, is a catastrophe in the making. But there's also an opportunity here. Universal employer retirement contributions, added to an account that's set up to travel with the individual, and with contributions set at levels that will allow everyone to retire would not only eliminate the looming crisis; it would go a long ways toward eliminating intergenerational poverty altogether.

12. They make themselves accountable.

Throughout the 90s, retailer Abercrombie & Fitch (A&F) built a fashion dynasty exclusively on the Euro-centric, "all-American" look. And as such, profits soared. But a decade later, in the wake of a rapidly diversifying America, combined with the company's reputation for being hostile to that same diversity, stock prices plummeted from \$84.23 to \$14.64 in one year. Then, there's Lululemon founder Chip Wilson, who, in a 2004 National Business Post magazine interview, inferred that he'd chosen the name, in part, because it was difficult for native Asian language speakers to pronounce. "I'd been playing with Ls and I came up with Lululemon," he said. "It's funny to watch them [Asians] try to say it."

Then, in 2013, in a Bloomberg interview, he stated that women with certain body shapes were unsuitable for the brand's clothing; comments made in response to rising complaints, especially from Latinx and African American women, regarding excessive piling and other problems. Instead of adjusting Lululemon products to fit the community, he essentially implied that it's their fault for buying athletic wear that wasn't made for them. "It's really about the rubbing through the thighs," he stated. These and other comments led to a backlash from women in general that nearly killed the company.

The same thing happens in nonprofits and municipalities – from the adversarial policing that's led to untold deaths and an erosion of trust in the communities they serve to charities that treat people uncharitably, from the Flint water crisis to federal agencies endowed with extraordinary powers and no public accountability. This, entities that no longer serve at the pleasure of the people or that exercise power without the consent of the governed, strikes at the heart of democracy, and over time, renders the entire society unstable. The overarching issue for social entities, whether mom-and-pop or multinational, whether social, private or public sector, is the same – that of community, and whether it's strengthened or weakened by our behavior.

As we've seen, fostering a strong sense of healthy community can pay off in all manner of ways from enhancing our ability to find great candidates to engendering customer loyalty to helping us recover from a misstep. But only if people are respected, treated well, and genuinely included. Each person who leaves your company as an employee could very well be a customer, an advocate or a partner. The same holds true for your customers, or, if you're a nonprofit, your clients. In every case, your various stakeholders can be your biggest cheerleaders or detractors. They can post great things about you in their social media feeds or share their horror stories. The reputation a company has is something it's building one decision at a time, and not taking inclusion seriously, especially in a post-majority America, can be fatal. Here are five key ways organizations can build communities that make them stronger rather than weaker:

A. Jettison the corporate mandate – The belief that corporations exist to be money-making machines for the relatively few who own shares is both wrongheaded and shortsighted. It's a strategy that can't be maintained in an ever-diversifying and increasingly interconnected world. Going forward, companies will have to learn to not just make money

but create value, to not just enrich shareholders but everyone who contributes to its success, and to do more good than harm. They'll need to replace the corporate mandate with a sustainability mindset.

B. Bring balance to power imbalances – Whether police stops or prison guards, psychiatric hospitals or senior care facilities, any situation where we have institutional authority at our backs and others lack the power to hold us accountable is one where we will almost certainly abuse it. But that's not all. Because everything is always in flux, by abusing that power, we're actually the catalyst for the rise of an equal and opposite reaction; one where they'll want to do more than balance the scales, but push us off of it. It's how people lose their jobs or go to jail. It's how famous coaches and religious leaders and film producers end up vilified and ostracized. And, it's how every member of Ferguson's City Council, the one that refused to implement the reforms required by the US Department of Justice, ended up voted out of office.

We can avoid this simply by identifying where we have imbalanced power and bringing balance to it. Body cams that we don't deactivate do this, as does holding open hearings. Undercover patients or residents in places where we care for people behind closed doors do this. Elections where they have the power to remove us from power do this. We think that doing so will cost us, but in reality, we're the ones who gain. Because by empowering them to hold us in check, we become the people they actually want in those positions.

C. Make community real – The communities we raise up around us might be our most powerful, yet overlooked asset. For one, they're our canary in the coal mine, letting us know – if we let them – when we're headed toward catastrophe. They're our strongest recruiting resource, enabling us to solicit recommendations and nominations for everything from employment positions to board vacancies. And, they're the people who will stick with us when we need it most. In 1980, just when a fledgling Whole Foods was getting started, the lone Austin store was nearly destroyed by the most damaging flood to hit the area in 70 years. The store's inventory was ruined, along with much of its equipment and they had no insurance. It was the people of Austin – everyone from customers to neighbors, staff to vendors, creditors to investors – who all pitched in to help with repairs and recovery. Remarkably, the store reopened in 28 days. It's up to us to foster this kind of community, to provide involvement opportunities and make it worth their while to be involved. To communicate openly and assess our social impact. To make community real.

D. Value every interpersonal exchange – We get this when it comes to “VIPs”. But that framing is faulty. Everyone we encounter is a very important person. It's up to us to learn to see them that way. Take job applicants. Imagine what would change if, instead of seeing ourselves as having something they need, we saw them as having something we need? After all, our people are the greatest determinant of our success. So, bring this mentality to the recruiting process. Make every candidate who responds feel valued and appreciated. Thank them for choosing to explore work with your company and seek to foster a relationship with them, even if they're not the right fit for that particular role. They might easily be a fit for another role, or pass on your job announcement to someone who is. They might become an ardent fan of your company or a loyal customer, an investor or potential partner. Solicit feedback on ways to make the nonprofit programs or business offerings more relevant and useful and take that feedback seriously. Make the executive team reachable. The more companies make themselves available for people to talk to them, and if they listen, the less likely they'll talk negatively about them.

E. Share the wealth – Ensure that every worker, from lowest to highest paid, both employees and contractors, has a voice and a vote. Award shares to the communities that make a company's business possible. Make every stakeholder a shareholder. Doing so fosters employee and customer loyalty and incentivizes people to do all they can to help the company succeed.

13. They never stop doing the work.

During segregation, managers complained for years that colored workers and women were constantly late getting back to work after breaks. It never occurred to them that the company itself, by having their bathrooms in other buildings, was causing the problem. As people, given our similarities, performance outcomes across groups are essentially the same. Therefore, whenever we discover disparate outcomes between groups, some kind of inequity, whether how we're conducting hiring or where we've instructed people to sit, is almost always the culprit. The key is recognizing that this is a never-ending effort; one that allows your organization to continually improve. In the past, inclusion meant wheelchair-accessible bathrooms. Today, it means fitting rooms for diverse genders or providing equal accommodation for faith minorities; schedules that allow for the observance of Jewish holidays or places where Muslim workers can conduct daily prayer. It will mean something else tomorrow. Below are four ways we can stay engaged:

A. See what they're seeing – Enlist people representing diversity as mystery shoppers and accessibility assessors to identify places where the company might be getting it wrong.

B. Always be about removing obstacles – Addressing accessibility means paying attention to everything from doorways, hallways and elevators, to desks, bathroom stalls and offices. It means making our websites usable by the visually impaired and making our application process workable for people who don't communicate well in writing. It means redesigning workspaces to be suitable for people who are sensitive to loud noises and bright lights. Accommodating the full gender landscape means providing non-binary restrooms. And these are just the start. From how we conduct interviews to how we hold meetings, if a month goes by where we've not uncovered some new way we can make our spaces more inclusive, then, chances are, we're not really looking.

C. Respect their identity – Creating an atmosphere where everyone belongs starts with things we don't do – not making presumptions about their racial identity, religion, sexuality, gender, etc. It means adopting respectful language and tone in all contexts, from correspondence with job candidates to conversing with customers. Refrain from requiring legal names until absolutely necessary, and when it's divulged to us, treat this information as absolutely confidential. It was law enforcement's violation of transman Brandon Teena's privacy by revealing his gender assigned at birth that unwittingly led to his murder.

D. Examine every assumption – We expect metrics like community livability and safety scores to do exactly that; let us know the likelihood we'll run into trouble in those places. But those metrics don't work equally well for everyone. For instance, they don't take into account the likelihood that an African American boy wearing a hoodie will be accosted simply while walking down the street, or that a same-sex family will be welcomed and safe. Or, consider the assumptions inherent in neighborhood watch signs that say "We Report Suspicious Persons" as opposed to "suspicious activities".

In many ways, insurer [Lemonade](#), a certified B Corp, operates differently than other companies in their sector. According to their website, "*Lemonade reverses the traditional insurance model. We treat the premiums you pay as if it's your money, not ours,*" they say, before going on to explain, "*With Lemonade, everything becomes simple and transparent.*" According to them, they "*take a flat fee, pay claims super fast, and [give back](#) what's left to causes you care about.*" Lemonade CEO Daniel Schreiber, in a 2020 Forbes article, elaborated on what he calls the "new normal" for business. "Not only can you do well by doing good," he said, "But soon there won't be any other way to do it."

But every company, even ones like this, has unfinished work when it comes to becoming all-inclusive. Take policies that result in the poor paying more. It's standard practice for insurers to charge higher premiums for the same policies issued to people in lower-income neighborhoods and to people with lower credit scores. Lemonade follows this practice. But besides the problems inherent in charging the poor more, some studies suggest that accidents are more likely to happen near our work than near our homes because the former is where our cars are most of the day. In so many ways, Lemonade has already shown its commitment. It's a company that's consistently willing to make changes to live up to its social mission. There's therefore no reason to doubt that, over time, they won't apply this commitment to other blind spots, including economic consciousness.

Becoming more inclusive, like forming a more perfect union, is a never-ending process. We start out getting it more wrong than right. And that's OK. Pastor Sam Williams, the senior minister I worked alongside during my years as a pastor, had a number of sayings that have always stuck with me. One of them was, "If something's worth doing, it's worth doing poorly." The idea is that the worthwhile things are hard to do well at first. But if they're really worth doing, we stick with them, like taking our falls before learning to walk, until we can do them well. That's what "For All" organizations do. They never stop doing the work.

Making the Shift

The first step for any organization that's truly serious about being a place for all is addressing the assumptions that have shaped so many of our choices so far. That starts with grasping where the problem lies; not with those relegated to the margins, but with us insiders. Outsiders aren't manning the controls of the mechanisms that keep them out. We are. As such, this is our work to do, not theirs. It's up to us to embark upon the hard work of adopting new mindsets; of changing our own minds. Below are seven ways we can get started.

1. Reverse our social orientation.

Right now, our tendency is to respond to anyone we identify as different with fear and suspicion, guilty until proven otherwise. In that framework, sameness is next to godliness, leading to cultures dominated by conformity. And this increases over time. The walls between us and them get thicker, the ways we can self-express get narrower, and our enforcement of the rules gets more ruthless. But that doesn't stop diversity. It's a far more powerful force than our constructs can ever be. The key is rejecting the notion that difference is evil and that diversity is a threat. It isn't. In an ever-changing universe, our continual diversification is humanity's greatest asset, and our saving grace. That means we want to cultivate it rather than eliminate it.

2. Own our own stuff.

We so desperately want to distance ourselves from this problem, as if it has nothing to do with us. It's a struggle for those of us who have grown up included to admit that we've benefitted; that there's privilege attached, and that much of our success can be attributed to that privilege. But the wood we've been burning in our hearths was pilfered from society's foundation. We're still deriving benefits from those actions today; in everything from the money we inherited and the property we own, to the way we're catered to in stores and are accepted wherever we go. We can't erase the past, but we *can* rectify it. And like the slave-owners-turned-abolitionists before us, the starting point is owning our own stuff.

3. Challenge our ideas of fairness.

In our discussion of Habit Three, we touched on how, in a fundamentally unequal system, the use of any tool that was not designed to account for such inequality is inherently discriminatory. That's because it can't help but be. If we built it, it's biased, and biased in favor of the builders. And the more objective it appears, the more vulnerable it is to hacking and skewing. That's because everything's in flux, and as Howard Zinn said, "You can't be neutral on a moving train." This applies especially to instruments like the Big Three proxies of discrimination – credit scores, background checks and work visas, which all assume that these tools are reflections of fairness and equitable treatment; which, of course, they are not.

4. De-stigmatize difference.

Today, from diversity awareness on college campuses to dealing with mass shootings, we're finally working to address the systemic factors behind bigotry and violence, instead of insisting that the problem is individual bad actors. Bad apples. But even here, even as we work the problem, we can find ourselves unintentionally validating a false narrative; one that's less about how we're different from those people, and more about how we're the same as these people. Despite what we've been told and how we've been groomed, diversity lives in all of us, and that's a good thing. Educating people on how to treat others they perceive as different is a first and necessary step. But we only truly solve the problem by destigmatizing difference itself; helping everyone recognize the ways in which they're also diverse, how they're better because of it, and how society is better off because of the diversity we all bring.

5. "Get" it.

"If only they'd just..." Any time we find ourselves using the word "just" when describing how they could solve the problem they're facing, we're already off course. The longer we've moved through the world as an insider, the more likely we are to insist that even the most complex problems "can't be that hard". With inclusion, even as we become increasingly aware of its importance, our tendency is to minimize it, to somehow shrink it down and frame it as something we can fix by tinkering around the edges, by applying a new coat of paint, rather than a complete rebuild. We do that by relegating it as a problem for one department to solve, or thinking we can fix it by tokenizing. We try to market our way out; telling ourselves that if we can change the narrative, we don't need to change the way we actually do business. But we don't get it. American society itself has shifted, and the only way forward is if the very DNA of our companies shifts to reflect it.

6. Defer to the disenfranchised.

One way of understanding the saying, "The last shall be first," is how the very act of surviving on the margins endows a person with extraordinary capabilities. Simply being among the enfranchised makes us all but blind to its limits; we're both ill-equipped to see where the system is breaking down and how to fix it. But not those on the margins. If inner qualities are often developed through challenges, then those who've suffered most have already outpaced the rest of us. In the face of relentless hostility, adversity and ill-will, enduring alienation, adversity and isolation, and in a society that tells them that they should be on their knees, they stand tall. They get stronger. They master resistance and resilience, ingenuity and insightfulness. It's those people, the ones who have lived their lives facing down the pointed end of the spear who, when trouble comes, have what it takes to lead us through it.

7. Define success by outcomes, not inputs.

DEI isn't an end in and of itself, but a means to an end. As such, attending diversity job fairs, changing our hiring protocols, and posting public statements of tolerance are all excellent actions. But all too often, we declare victory prematurely, solely based on inputs, then retire from the field. But little about real life and how people experience it is changed. Every social entity exists in community, with all kinds of stakeholders whose fates are bound up in its own. This gets us back to the "network of inescapable mutuality," and how no society that allows some of us to exploit the rest of us can survive for long. Success is only achieved when outcomes for all stakeholders, and especially the least served, have shifted, and when we're all positioned to thrive.

Our March toward Inclusion

At the same time, we're, by no means, starting from scratch, nor are we doing this on our own. So many others who've come before us have laid the foundations upon which we, the people are building. And today, all across the country and in all manner of ways, we're taking on the work of forming a more perfect union.

Take New York City, which, in 2015, passed a law making it illegal to use credit scores in employment decisions. By 2019, eleven states (California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Nevada, Oregon, Vermont and Washington), along with Washington DC had similar laws on the books, and in 2020, a federal version passed the House. This proliferation of legislation is largely due to the research revealing how credit reporting, as a for-profit industry, unfairly and disproportionately penalizes certain segments of the population - particularly, ethnic minorities and the working class, and how the data on which the scores are based, information submitted by other for-profit companies, is often inaccurate, outdated and in dispute.

Or, take venture philanthropist, REDF, which, in its April 2023 newsletter, stated: *"Like you, we believe everyone deserves a fair chance. And we want those chances to be woven throughout the fabric of our society. The country marks April as Fair Chance Month—a time dedicated to recognizing the enormous talent of the 1 in 3 Americans who have been involved with the justice system. Over 650,000 people return home from prison every year ready to build a better life. But they face steep barriers to getting a job, and nearly 75% remain unemployed a year after being released."*

REDF is part of a growing movement advocating for Fair Chance employment – ending the practice of denying gainful employment to people with a conviction on their record. Likewise, Columbia Business School, in April 2023, co-sponsored a conference focused on making the business case for Fair Chance employment, and conference co-sponsor, SCBC, in their [Why it Matters](#) report, made a compelling case for this approach, including how workers with convictions on their record not only perform as well or better than workers without, they stay in their jobs longer (which reduces turnover and vacancies), and contribute to company culture in powerful ways (which makes the company more successful). The report includes quotes from a range of companies who have become strong advocates of the practice, including JPMorgan Chase, Eaton Corporation, Kroger, Verizon and Target.

Or, take Rhode Island, where, in 2013, led by Governor Lincoln Chafee, the legislature ratified the *Marriage Equality Act*. Even more remarkable? He had the support of the entire Republican caucus in the Rhode Island

Senate, the first time a caucus of either party, in any state, had been unanimous in its support for same-sex marriage. In his op-ed, he argued that this is more than just a moral or social justice issue, and that *“Rhode Island is a better state, and America is a better country, when we are as inclusive as possible.”*

There’s California, which, in 2021, became the first state to make free breakfast and lunch available to every public school student in the state. Maine followed suit later that same year, and by August 2023, a total of eight states – California, Maine, Colorado, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico and Vermont – all offered permanent universal free school meal programs.

Or, take background check reform. In June 2023, New York State passed the nation’s first *Clean Slate Act*; legislation that gets to the heart of the matter – neutralizing the instrument that makes initiatives like Fair Chance employment necessary. Even many of the employers who support hiring people with convictions still require that candidates divulge this information, and/or conduct background checks on prospective employees. Yet, extensive research reveals the plethora of problems inherent in their use; not the least of which is how frequently people who are poor, but actually innocent, are found guilty, and likewise, the frequency with which people who are wealthy, and who are, in fact, guilty, are set free.

The damage is further multiplied by the immense amount of conviction and sentencing disparity baked into the system. Studies overwhelmingly show the frequency with which two people charged with the same offense in the same circumstances receive different convictions – one felony and one misdemeanor. Then, there’s the collective costs. The Brennan Center, in a [2023 report](#), revealed that more than 2 million New Yorkers have a criminal record and that those records cost the state an estimated \$12.6 billion each year in reduced earnings. The New York state law circumvents this entirely by, in essence, wiping the slate clean, which means there’s no longer anything to report. Or, take Hustle 2.0, which offers business coursework to incarcerated persons while they’re serving time, preparing them to start their own businesses instead of begging for work upon release. Their job profiles say, “Applicants with histories of incarceration are especially encouraged to apply.”

And there’s the fight for a livable wage where, despite resistance at the federal level to raising the minimum wage, state and local governments aren’t waiting around. The [Economic Policy Institute](#) reported that in the first half of 2023 alone, 19 states and localities enacted minimum wage increases; most of which are automatic adjustments linked to inflation. In 2009, the national minimum wage was increased to \$7.25 per hour. It has not been increased since.

Finally, there’s the diversification of media. In Habit 4, we described some of the ways commercials have changed; including interracial and same-sex families, people with limb differences and of all sizes, and so forth. This alone is evidence of how businesses are pivoting in every respect, embracing the diverse society we’re rapidly becoming, and sending clear signals that “all are welcome here”. But commercials do so much more than market products. The people depicted in them are default authorities; shaping everything from who we believe to be attractive to what’s normal.

Media representation in general, moving people from invisible to visible, and showing them as participants in and shapers of all facets of American culture, changes how we see ourselves; both individually and

collectively. Their presence affects what we value and influences what we deem desirable, informs the degree to which we hold stereotypes and largely determines whether we believe diversity – both theirs and ours – is something we should embrace or deny. But perhaps most significantly, media, in all its myriad forms, shapes our sense of collective identity and who is included, or not included in it. That’s why being conscious of who we’re depicting is so important. Because the more inclusive we are, the stronger we’ll be.

The above doesn’t even scratch the surface of all the ways we’re taking on the task of making belonging real. From United We Dream to Omaha Nebraska’s Tri-Faith Initiative, from White Birminghamians for Black Lives to the fight for trans rights, in small towns and big cities, whether via signs posted in yards or on social media, in myriad ways every day, our march toward inclusion, a land made for you and me, continues.

Conclusion – Down Payment on the Future

For more than a century, we, the American people, have been making shifts toward inclusion because it’s right. Abolitionists challenged us to determine what kind of nation we’d be. Freedom Riders and color-line crossers, marchers and protestors all spurred us on, demanding that we expand the borders of society to make room for people we’d identified as “other”. We struck down laws that told people who they couldn’t marry, that legalized separate but equal, and that denied citizenship to immigrants of Asian ancestry. And that’s all before we’d even hit the changes the sixties brought or those we’ve witnessed since.

Frederick Douglass, in his 1857 “West India Emancipation” address, describing both Wilberforce’s “magic eloquence” and revolts by the slaves themselves said, *“While one showed that slavery was wrong, the other showed that it was dangerous as well as wrong.”* That’s not far from where we are today. We’ve long realized that exclusion is wrong: We’re now, for the first time, recognizing how it’s also dangerous. We will never again be the nation we were; one where African Americans are at the back of the bus and Latinx are in the fields, where gays are in the closet and Asians are doing our laundry, where men were told how to be men and women were told to stay in their place.

It will never again be OK to disparage religious minorities or refuse equal accommodation to persons with disabilities. The post-majority, globally connected society we’re becoming is one where caustic campaigns can’t win, hostile congregations can’t thrive and exploitative companies can’t sustain. And in every way we’ve changed, we’re better for it. Because in this nation we’re becoming, we’re choosing to make a down payment on the future; to rebuild the common ground that, at the start, was our defining virtue. And that’s why doing this – rebuilding for inclusion – is so vital.

At the same time, there’s no app for this, no easy fix, no one sure way to get this right. We’re in uncharted territory, going places humankind has never gone before. Closing the gap between the society we have and the people we’re becoming will, of course, require big changes; to our processes and protocols, priorities and practices. But in many ways, that’s the low-hanging fruit. Success ultimately hinges on whether we, individually, can learn to both honor our own diversity and that of others, and, collectively, whether we can choose pathways that don’t just embrace some of us, but all of us. Because that’s how, together, we build for ourselves a future.

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