



## DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE

### New TRSA committee will focus on workforce justice issues

By *Angela Howard and Russell Holt*

In June, TRSA launched its Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) initiative to serve as a resource for TRSA Members. At about the same time, several TRSA members were emailing each other to learn what they could do about fellow members' programs to bolster their own programs. From that interest and energy came the idea to form a member-driven committee that will align its vision, mission, and objectives with TRSA's DE&I initiative.<sup>1</sup> Both are working together to advance DE&I awareness and culture in the workplace. The committee's purpose is to promote change that fosters diversity, equity and inclusion by sharing ideas, educating members and creating DE&I programs specific to the linen, uniform and facility services industry.

The cultural concepts of diversity, equity and inclusion have been around for some time, humming in the background like the sound of traffic on some distant

highway. But recently, several societal issues and events have driven those concepts to the forefront of the industry's awareness. The rationale of why diversity, equity and inclusion make sense covers the full spectrum from the legal to the moral, with financial considerations stretched across the middle.

Legal requirements that protect under-represented groups are the base—the lowest common denominator—in the DE&I equation. More evolved companies view the EEOC regulations as the bottom rung of the equity ladder; those more enlightened companies' have goals to climb to the top rung to be recognized as the industry's leaders in DE&I cultural advancement.

Savvy business leaders know that there is a strong case to be made to promote a more DE&I-oriented culture. A wealth of evidence proves that cultivating a diverse and inclusive workforce helps

produce high-performing teams that can dramatically improve a company's success through increased innovation, collaboration and team effectiveness.

Research clearly shows that having a more diverse workforce is linked to companies' success:

- 2.3 times higher cash flow per employee. (Deloitte)
- 35% greater chance of higher financial returns on their national industry median. (McKinsey & Co.)
- Larger sales revenue, more customers and greater profits (*Harvard Business Review*)

As importantly, producing a more diverse and inclusive work environment is the right thing to do for ethical and moral reasons. Among other benefits, it helps companies promote themselves as community leaders. To be sure, many companies in the linen, uniform and facility services industry understand the importance of taking a forward-thinking stance on DE&I in the workplace and have already launched their initiatives. For some, however, the terms Diversity, Equity and Inclusion may not be commonplace. Below is a brief explanation of each term:

#### DIVERSITY

Diversity is all the ways people differ, which includes race, gender, religion, ideas, perspectives, languages, physical appearances, thoughts, national origin, socio-economic status and so on. Now, stop and think for a moment about the last meeting you were in. How diverse was the group of attendees there? If the meeting's demographic makeup looked all the same, like slightly altered carbon copies, your organization could have an opportunity for improvement.

<sup>1</sup> [www.trsa.org/resources/human-resources/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-inclusion-vision-mission-objectives/](http://www.trsa.org/resources/human-resources/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-inclusion-vision-mission-objectives/)

**EQUITY**

When people hear the term equity, they often confuse it with the term equality. Although these words may be etymological cousins, they do not mean the same thing. Equity relates to the moral term, meaning fair treatment, access, opportunity and advancement for all people covering the full diversity spectrum. Equity is an attitude of striving to identify and eliminate barriers that prevent the full participation in groups. The moral implications of working on improving equity in the workplace involve developing a more just system in our organizations.

**INCLUSION**

The term inclusion can, in some ways, create a dilemma. In our industry, image is important; many companies focus on conformity, which could lead to unintentional biases; too much lockstep conformity can bring about stagnated

company cultures. Creating a more inclusive environment is a process in which any individual or group can feel welcomed, respected and valued to fully participate in the organization. This orientation helps foster a environment that embraces differences and offers respect for all people. One may ask: How does a company that prides itself on a uniformed image cultivate a diverse and inclusive workplace? That, among other questions, will be among the issues that the DE&I Committee will tackle.

**DE&I COMMITTEE AGENDA**

The committee will work on several issues that address barriers leading to unfair conditions for marginalized populations, such as understanding the concept of unconscious bias, the impact of implicit (unconscious) bias on hiring and promoting and using training to combat the effects of unconscious bias. The committee will work on programs to help

members promote racial equity in their workplaces. It will conduct studies on the financial impact and benefits of cultivating a more diverse/inclusive culture and will report back to TRSA members.

TRSA's DE&I Committee is just forming. We are actively seeking members to join the committee. If you are interested in joining or would like to know more about TRSA's DE&I initiative, please contact Salita Jones, TRSA's director of meetings at [sjones@trsa.org](mailto:sjones@trsa.org). 

 **ANGELA HOWARD AND RUSSELL HOLT** are chair and vice chair, respectively, of TRSA's new Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee. Howard is also vice president of people development and human experience for Spindle, Woodridge, IL. Contact her at [ahoward@dober.com](mailto:ahoward@dober.com) or 630.410.7300. Holt, SPHR, is the chief compliance officer for Superior Linen Service, Tulsa, OK. Contact him at [r.holt@superlinen.com](mailto:r.holt@superlinen.com) or 479.725.4889.

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