

Beating Back Bias for Institutional (and Personal) Advantage

Lauren Leader-Chivé, founder and CEO of All in Together and author of *Crossing the Thinnest Line*, helps us understand the concept of acquired diversity

It seems every year that new evidence, empirical and anecdotal, supports what we see in our own organizations: the impact of successfully integrated diversity is measurably positive. Why, then, are so many companies unable to capture those benefits?

Organizations can craft strong policies on diversity and enforce them consistently through the ranks. In fact, many of the world's regulatory environments have mandated diversity standards. But is compliance enough to glean all the competitive advantages of diversity in the workplace? If the full range of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives share a table with perfectly blended demographic representation, is that enough? What is the difference between well-executed policies and genuine diversity and inclusion?

The answer may include "acquired diversity."

Lauren Leader-Chivé, founder and CEO of All In Together, is a writer, researcher and thought leader on diversity and women's issues in the workplace. She defines acquired diversity as "a perspective, a world-view and a way of thinking, interacting, and working with others that's more inclusive, open and critical." That world-view may be the key to leaders becoming true champions of diversity, modeling the way for more inclusive (and therefore more successful) organizations.

In a recent interview, Leader-Chivé explained that the notion of acquiring diversity is a bit tongue-in-cheek. "You are not literally "becoming diverse," she says, rather,

someone with acquired diversity is a person who "develops a deep and meaningful sense of empathy for the experiences of those who are outsiders; someone who develops a kind of understanding for the experience of others."

In her recently published book *Crossing the Thinnest Line* (Hachette, Sept. 2016), Leader-Chivé writes, "We found that leaders with certain life experiences were more likely to foster a speak-up culture, to support and encourage others, to be open to feedback, and to ensure everyone would be heard." Those are the leaders who foster the inclusion of diverse voices, reaping rewards that are hard to deny.

With evidence mounting that people who have developed a deep sense of empathy lead in more inclusive, collaborative ways, Leader-Chivé says, "Having leaders who can really relate to and have empathy for those who are different from them is a powerful differentiator in business."

For example, in 2012, Credit Suisse identified a strong association between diverse leadership and higher performance. Also in 2012, McKinsey measured the two-year performance of 180 publicly traded companies across Europe and North America and found that the return on equity and margins on earnings were significantly higher for companies with the most diversity than those with the least. The findings from 2012 were confirmed by Credit Suisse in their 2015 follow-up study, "The CS Gender 3000: Women in Senior Management."

Then why isn't there more diversity at the board level and in senior management? Credit Suisse identified the greatest

