



BEYOND WHAT MEETS THE EYE: CHAMPIONING THE UNSEEN IDENTITIES AT WORK

It's easy to celebrate what's visible, the titles, the skills, the personality traits that show up in meetings. But the most powerful parts of a person's identity? They often live beneath the surface, unseen, unheard, and unspoken. Ignoring them is more than a missed connection. It's a missed opportunity for performance.

Inclusion isn't just about recognising visible diversity, like race, gender, or age.

True inclusion embraces every story: the mental health battles, the neurodiversity, the caregiving responsibilities, the cultural backgrounds people rarely talk about.



Research from Deloitte shows that employees who can share their authentic selves at work are 42% less likely to say they'll leave in the next year. Retention is performance.

When leaders champion unseen identities, three things happen:



1. **Psychological safety skyrockets** — people feel safe to share challenges, leading to faster problem-solving.



2. **Creativity expands** — lived experiences outside the “mainstream” spark new approaches.



3. **Trust deepens** — teams bond over shared humanity, not just shared KPIs.

This doesn't mean asking people to reveal everything. It means building a culture where, if they choose to share, they know it will be received with respect not judgement.

For Leaders:



1. **Listen for the quiet cues** — what's not being said can be as telling as what is.



2. **Normalise flexibility** — policies that accommodate diverse needs help unseen identities thrive.



3. **Lead by example** — share aspects of your own story that go beyond your job title.

For Employees:

1. **Respect boundaries** — inclusion doesn't mean intrusion.
2. **Back colleagues** who share unseen parts of themselves.
3. **Be curious**, not assumptive.

BOTTOM LINE:

Inclusion means embracing every story, seen and unseen, heard and unheard. Do that, and you don't just build better teams, you build teams that trust, innovate, and perform beyond what meets the eye.

References

1. <https://www2.deloitte.com/insights/us/en/focus/human-capital-trends/2017/diversity-and-inclusion-at-the-workplace.html>
2. Edmondson, A. (2019). The fearless organization: Creating psychological safety in the workplace for learning, innovation, and growth. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.



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