

15 Tips for Building a More Inclusive Workplace in 2021

It's a no-brainer that [diversity makes for a stronger workforce](#). When companies embrace and value employees of different backgrounds into an inclusive workplace, they reap the rewards in creativity and innovation, a strong company culture, improved [employee performance](#), and more.

But diversity isn't the same as inclusivity. Think of inclusivity as the next step to successfully supporting a diverse workforce: It's all about creating an inclusive environment that welcomes and includes each employee.

While inclusivity makes us feel good, inclusive workplace cultures offer far greater benefits than a warm and fuzzy feeling. So they're plain good business sense. [Deloitte](#) reports that inclusive workplaces are **6X** as likely to be innovative, and have **2.3X** the cash flow per employee over non-inclusive workplaces in a 3-year period.

So, if you're ready to launch your inclusivity initiatives, we've put together **15 tips to help your employees flourish**, regardless of sex, race, gender, age, religious background, physical ability, or sexual orientation.

1. Get buy-in from the top

When it comes to creating and promoting an inclusive workplace, **your biggest allies will be your leadership team**. Prioritizing inclusivity at your organization will be a challenge if the C-suite doesn't prioritize it, as well.

Educate your company's leaders about the importance of inclusivity. This includes offering diversity and inclusivity (D&I) training at the C-suite level. It also means creating a safe space for your leaders to ask awkward or embarrassing questions "behind the curtain" before leading inclusivity initiatives company-wide. Once leadership is comfortable and on board, they'll be fantastic resources for setting an authentic, inclusive tone for all.

2. Integrate inclusivity into your core values

You should already make it a habit to revisit your company's core values periodically, especially during **moments of major change**. If your core values don't already include a statement on inclusive culture, get the buy-in from leadership to draft an update and implement it.

To get the most bang for your buck, ask for suggestions and feedback from employees company-wide, **especially if your leadership and HR teams collectively aren't very diverse**. The additional perspectives may help fill in a blank you've missed, and help you earn crucial top-to-bottom buy-in.

3. Model inclusive language

As an HR professional, you can be a powerful agent of change by walking the walk — and, well, talking the talk. In all professional communications, model inclusive language. **Learn and use the preferred pronouns for employees in your company**, and use "spouse" or "partner" rather than the gendered "husband" or "wife" to refer to someone's spouse (especially if you don't know their gender). Partner also works for non-married couples, too.

As always, be very careful to avoid using harmful language. If you do, **apologize correctly** and do the work to ensure you won't repeat the mistake.

4. Encourage a culture of frequent check-ins

1-on-1s aren't just for providing in-the-moment feedback. They're also opportunities to **build trust**. And trust is key for the open dialogue that allows employees to honestly express their needs — or discuss challenges they may experience in your workplace (particularly those of a sensitive nature).

If your organization doesn't already have a [continuous feedback culture](#), read up! It can work wonders for the [employee experience](#).

5. Create safe spaces

Many companies have already done a wonderful job promoting non-binary and genderqueer inclusion by providing gender-neutral restrooms.

If your organization hasn't already created such a space, consider it. Think, too, about other needs for privacy and safe spaces at work, such as lactation rooms for new mothers, prayer or meditation spaces, and quiet workspaces for workers who may be distracted or overstimulated by open floor plans.

Full remote? **This extends to the remote space as well.** Create digital safe "spaces" by encouraging employees to add pronouns to their email signatures and user names. Invite employees to reserve time for prayer and other personal needs by blocking it out on the calendar. Honor introverts by making digital culture events optional.

To fully understand the needs of everyone at your company, **partner with managers to learn more about their teams.** Employees may feel awkward advocating for themselves, and managers, who have a close eye on their reports' skills and needs, can communicate these to you.

6. Create an inclusive workplace task force

Now that you've got the C-suite's buy-in, think about the stakeholders and key players whose input could help bring your organization's inclusivity culture to life. These should be people who are passionate about inclusivity and will put in the extra time and effort to realize the vision.

They'll also be responsible for bringing new initiatives back to leadership and working with you and other units within the company to implement and communicate change. **Be sure the task force itself is diverse**, representing not only varying social demographics, but also office location (if you're multi-office), and job function. But be respectful in how you solicit members. Never make anyone feel tokenized.

7. Expand your company holiday calendar

Little things mean a lot — and for minority groups, even small instances of representation can make a world of difference. (That's why Kazoo joined companies across the nation in [making Juneteenth a company holiday](#), by the way.)

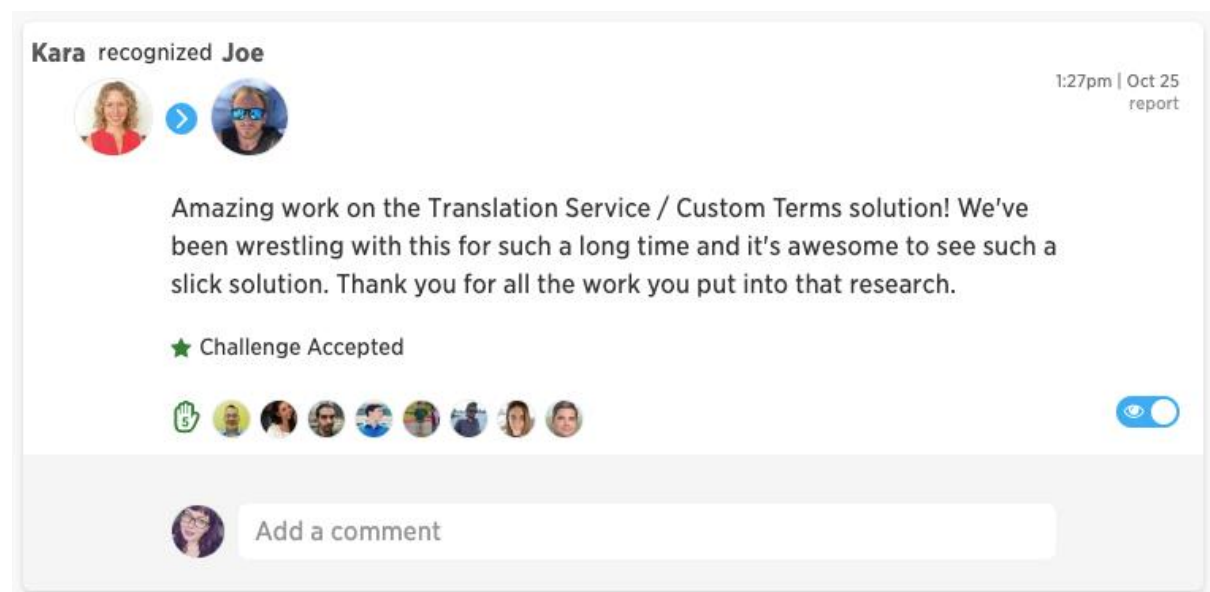
Take a look at your company's holiday calendar. In addition to Christian and secular holidays like Christmas and New Year's, be sure to **include holidays that represent the religious beliefs of your company at large.**

For Jewish employees, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are considered the major high holy days. Chanukah is nice, but on the Jewish calendar, it's — pardon the latkes joke — small potatoes. For Muslims, include Eid-al-Fitr, Eid-al-Adha, Ramadan, and Muharram. For Hindus, add Diwali, and Navrati.

If it's not possible to make these company-wide holidays, at least acknowledge them on the calendar to raise awareness and increase the sense of recognition and belonging for practitioners.

8. Recognize and reward everyone's performance

At Kazoo, we can't say enough about the power of rewards and recognition. Not only does recognition drive employee engagement and boost morale, but singling out and rewarding specific behavior also signals your company's values. Before the start of the next quarter, thoughtfully review the employees who have received public recognition in the past, and for what.



If you're rewarding the same behaviors consistently (i.e., top sales), consider the signal this sends to your employees about the specific skills and talents your company values. Think about other, less visible contributions, and how they help your company, workers, and culture flourish, and queue them up for recognition in the next quarter.

9. Create events and initiatives focused on inclusivity

When it comes to planning work events and initiatives that celebrate inclusion, the sky's the limit. So host [Pride Month](#) mixers, screen documentaries during lunch, or invite guest speakers who cover a diverse range of topics.

On top of that, make sure your organization's activities promote and support diversity as well. Who are you inviting to public-facing events? Which charitable causes does your company support during volunteer days and fundraisers? All of these are great opportunities to foster team-building and morale as you actively celebrate your inclusive workplace culture.

10. Make sure your office is wheelchair-accessible

To welcome all employees as well as visitors, make sure your office is wheelchair-accessible, especially common areas like the kitchen and restrooms. Older offices can include small steps or uneven floors that present major mobility obstacles; even if your building is **ADA-compliant**, it can be easy to crowd corridors and corners.

Do a walkthrough of all common areas, and better yet, if it's available to you, rent or borrow a wheelchair and use it to navigate your office building. This will help you identify accessibility pain points, and make your workspace more accessible to all.

Not in the office? Support remote workers by encouraging them to do an accessibility and ergonomics check on their home office. Create a budget to supply them with the tools they need to succeed.

11. Emphasize inclusivity in diversity training

You know that **diversity and inclusivity aren't the same thing** — but do your employees? It's possible to have a diverse workplace that isn't inclusive. Minority employees, though present, may feel excluded or like they aren't represented in the workplace culture. Raise awareness of that nuance explicitly in training so that employees can fully [embrace the diversity around them](#), and develop the soft skills to thrive in a diverse environment.

12. Create opportunities for conversation

Let's face it: No matter how woke we think we are, we never stop learning new things about the people around us. Your employees likely have strong relationships

with their immediate teammates, but **how well do they know their other colleagues?**

Encourage a workplace culture of inclusivity by making opportunities for employees to mix and chat. This could take a formal structure, like town hall meetings. But don't underestimate the authenticity of a casual setting like company-wide lunches, happy hours, volunteer days, or cross-team activities.

13. Put pronouns in your email signature

One way to model inclusive behavior is to include your preferred pronouns in email signatures, org charts, and slack names, such as "Candice Mitchell, she/her," or "Jameson Alex, he/they/them."



Example of gender pronouns from Asana

This signals your awareness of and **respect for preferred pronouns** and is welcoming to genderqueer and nonbinary employees. So encourage your organization to include gender pronouns in company email signature templates for widespread adoption.

14. Provide a forum for introverts to shine

It's no secret that traditional corporate culture rewards extroversion. Those who speak up in meetings, take charge of projects, and advocate for themselves climb the ladder in leaps and bounds over their skilled (but quieter) coworkers.

As part of your inclusivity initiatives, **train managers to make space in meetings** to hear employees who may be more inclined to hang back, or might feel anxious arguing a salient point. Offer to fund noise-canceling headphones and opportunities to give non-verbal feedback, such as suggestion boxes.

Finally, designate solitary spaces to work and eat so that these thoughtful, talented workers can recharge and keep giving you their best.

15. Include multilingual signage

No matter what language you speak, installing multilingual signage can instantly signal "all are welcome here" to employees and office visitors. It can also serve as a gentle reminder to employees that they're part of a greater, more diverse world, regardless of the language spoken in the office.
