

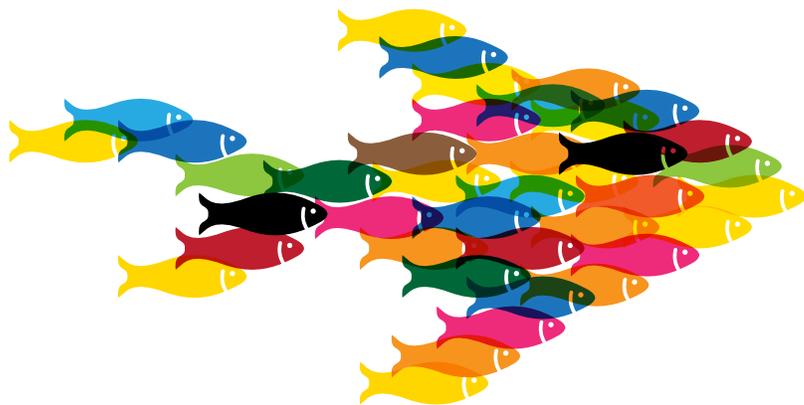
# Inclusion and Equity in Facilities Management: “The Power to Influence”

By Kimberly Case-Nichols

In higher education facilities management today, it is nearly impossible to create policy or make daily decisions without acknowledging the ever-changing demographics and student expectations within our organizations. Facilities is undeniably one of the most diverse departments on campus, encompassing every level of the profession, as well as an array of personal cultures. This level of diversity presents a great opportunity for us to lead the discussion, and to manage how we provide inclusive and equitable

experiences and perceptions, while being sensitive to differences in the cultural beliefs and practices of others. Many of us are challenged with “seeing” beyond our own subconscious biases, and how they may help—or impede—another person’s opportunities or access. Sometimes, we struggle with the “I don’t know what I don’t know” syndrome.

A starting point for this growth process is simply being willing to learn more about yourself, acknowledge your behavioral blind spots toward others, and develop insight so you can improve your cultural competence. As professional leaders, sharing our own diverse experiences can help connect people, encourage others, and demonstrate how different affiliations enrich our lives.



opportunities—not only for our facilities profession, but for our students, staff, and communities as well.

Quality leadership advocates for engagement and cultural competency as well as inclusive and equitable practices at every level. Cultural competence in the workplace is a personal responsibility that requires taking action to achieve desired outcomes. That responsibility starts with each one of us.

## WHAT IS CULTURAL COMPETENCY?

In the broadest sense, being culturally competent encompasses being aware of one’s own cultural

## SELF-REFLECTION AND PERSONAL POWER

If you wrote an essay about your career and how you got where you are, you would probably reflect on many “aha” moments, and on people (other than your parents) who believed you had potential. Perhaps it was not only working hard, but also having a personal connection with someone, or perhaps the timing of your career change, that helped pave your way. Starting with self-reflection gives you the power to develop insight, and improves your ability to understand societal ideologies and ultimately embrace inclusive thinking.

As you think about how you navigated through your career, what was your inspiration? What are your values, and how have they changed? Be honest with yourself in order to employ a healthy perspective. The power to influence starts with you.

## USING YOUR POWER TO INFLUENCE OTHERS

Once you have tapped into what inspires you and are more aware of your own beliefs and behaviors, you have the cultural competence to foster an inclusive and equitable workplace. There are a number of ways to practice this:

- Be an active listener, and open to diverse perspectives.
- Ask questions and demonstrate your authentic interest to know more.
- Allow others to lead conversations on perspectives of cross-cultural interactions and experiences, and share personal stories of your own.
- Have open and direct conversations to address gender stereotypes and areas of unconscious bias.
- Do not automatically ask the female staff to take meeting notes, set up the office potluck, or send calendar invites.
- Set respectful and fair expectations of inclusive and equitable practices for each employee, and make this part of ongoing performance review discussions.
- Be proactive and encourage employees, students, and community members to participate in discussions and committees so that they have a voice at the table.
- Guide team meetings to include how to address disrespectful jokes, or when people are excluded from decision making or access.
- Assign projects or tasks to an employee to get them out of their comfort zone. Allow them to make mistakes and offer teachable moments to learn.
- Create career-planning succession with each employee, and help them take that next step that they only dreamed of.
- Provide intentional training programs and allow time for employees to participate. For example:
  - Participate in the APPA Mentoring Program
  - Attend conferences
  - Join or start a committee or community of interest
  - Earn an APPA Educational Facilities Professional (EFP) or Certified Educational Facilities Professional (CEFP) credential
  - Provide or look for internship opportunities

## SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Many of those who achieve their greatest goals are met with adversity, including discrimination because of gender, race, or economic and social status; and sometimes they are denied access to opportunities that come easily to others. As professional facility leaders, we have the power to influence individuals, teams, and an entire organization. Don't let terms, labels, or terminology get in the way of simply talking about and addressing important issues. What is important is that we understand that developing cultural competence for all of us is a lifelong journey. By educating yourself, you can educate others and share the responsibility for fostering inclusion and fairness.

Facilities are the backbone to every higher education institution. As facility leaders and managers, we can influence others to step in and step up with courage, provide opportunities/access, and build a strong support system. Inclusive and equitable practice in facilities are not just about doing the right thing, but about how you influence others to work to their full potential—whether it's developing trade skills, managing a facility project, or mentoring an individual.

Creating a statement of inclusion and equitable practice is a great start. However, we can only truly influence others when we take action ourselves and measure and assess the progress being made. By using our privileges and power for others, we can create an authentic, inclusive work culture that promotes success.

Always remember: we have the power to influence. ☪

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