

# White men: Four things you can do to advance diversity

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When I tell people that PwC has a formal initiative called “White Men & Diversity,” the reactions I get range from polite surprise to outright skepticism. The words “white men” and “diversity” are rarely linked together, but they should be if organizations are serious about creating inclusion.

When the topic of diversity comes up, white men often feel labeled “the bad guys.” We can be so worried about saying the wrong thing that sometimes we default to saying nothing instead. But that is a mistake. Success today, whether in business or in our communities, requires cultural dexterity – the ability to work effectively with people who are different from ourselves. To build that skill we must understand the lens through which we view the world. For white men, that means acknowledging that we have a race and a gender. While we are not a monolithic group, those dimensions of diversity are important aspects of our identity and they do influence our experiences at work. It also means recognizing that we can contribute to advancing diversity in our organizations. Here are some ideas worth exploring.

## **1. Ask questions and listen.**

When I became the leader of PwC’s New York office I hosted a series of dinners with women partners to better understand their experience of the firm. My primary goal was to listen and I resisted the masculine urge to jump in immediately with solutions. While each woman had a different set of circumstances, certain themes emerged again and again in these conversations. My female colleagues were looking for more transparency about advancement opportunities and more chances to connect with senior leaders. They wanted

the firm to expand client networking events beyond traditional golf outings. And every woman, whether single or married, with or without children, wanted more flexibility to pursue her personal goals. While those issues were also relevant to my male colleagues, they did not experience them with the same sense of urgency or to the same degree. I could only understand the nuances of that gender difference by listening first and taking action later.

## **2. Acknowledge blind spots.**

More than 1,000 men at PwC have participated in a White Men & Diversity session. One of the explicit goals of the workshop is to explore blindspots, the unconscious assumptions we make that influence our behavior and can lead to incorrect conclusions. Through these discussions, we found that many white men believe talking about diversity is inherently divisive and that we should all aim to be colorblind in the workplace. While this approach is rooted in a concern for fairness, it unintentionally negates the experiences of our Asian, Black, Hispanic and female colleagues who don't want their identity to be ignored. This blind spot also prevents us from having candid conversations and leveraging the diverse talent on our teams. Acknowledging that we all have blind spots and working to gain alternative perspectives is critical.

I would also add that getting these discussions out in the open is critical. Just last week PwC hosted our [Aspire to Lead](#) webcast that focused on the role confidence plays in helping women grow as leaders and achieve professional success. This webcast was viewed by students on campuses around the world, as well as PwC colleagues, our clients and our family members, and our panelists confirmed the important role that men play in supporting women. We are also lending our support to Lean In's new campaign [#LeanInTogether for Equality](#) and we are a founding [IMPACT](#) partner for the United Nation's global initiative [HeForShe](#). Both initiatives foster dialogue and provide a platform for men to demonstrate their commitment to gender equality.

## **3. Experience being in the minority.**

When you're in the majority, as men often are in business, you rarely notice the experience. The feeling of belonging is seamless, which is why it's so important to consciously seek out occasions where you are the minority member of a group.

Like many firms, PwC has a number of initiatives targeted to specific groups, including Vanguard -- an onboarding program for newly hired black professionals. This two-day, interactive development program delves into the unwritten rules of professional life and explicitly addresses how to navigate when you are in the minority. The program is transformational for both the participants and for invited guests like me. The experience of being one of very few white people in a room of black professionals was eye-opening. I had a heightened awareness of my race and suddenly felt more scrutiny about how I was representing my group -- in this case, other white partners.

At Vanguard I have the privilege of hearing directly from our black partners and staff insights about what makes them successful and how the firm can become even more inclusive. I've had similar experiences with women's networks and other groups such as

our LGBT partner board. Even a glimpse into what it's like to walk in someone else's shoes is valuable and makes me a better leader.

#### **4. Make it personal.**

As chairman and senior partner of one of the largest professional services firms, I fully understand the business case for diversity. I speak to business leaders daily and I hear directly from them about the challenges of finding the right talent they need to be successful. The changing demographics of the global labor force -- and the critical need for talent -- provide a compelling platform for change. And, in our [2015 US CEO Survey](#), 98% of participating CEOs said that their diversity strategy has helped them to attract the talent they need.

But those trends can feel abstract when it comes to day-to-day life. That is why I encourage men, of all ages and at all levels, to find their personal case for inclusion. Early in my career I was fortunate to work in Human Resources where I learned firsthand that people are the core of our business and that diversity is a source of strength. I continue to be motivated by the people around me: my family, my team, my colleagues, and my clients.

#### **My challenge to men.**

The way I see it, white men have a role to play and a choice to make. We can do something or we can do nothing. What I believe is we can make a difference by taking this one conversation and one person at time. When you ask questions, listen to someone else's perspective, and show them that you care, it's very hard to get this wrong.

I also encourage you to join me and many others at PwC in supporting groups working to involve men in this dialogue, including HeForShe and Lean In's #LeanInTogether for Equality. Make a public pledge for equality at [www.heforshe.org](http://www.heforshe.org). Visit [leanintogether.org](http://leanintogether.org) to show your support and learn more.

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