

Torch



How to build
a diverse
workplace
with coaching
and mentoring



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The importance of workplace diversity

When asked to picture a diverse workplace, what do you see? Is it an office or Zoom call full of people who look different from yourself? Perhaps you envision healthy conflict with someone who holds a different viewpoint. Maybe you think of more product innovation brought by unique perspectives.

It's likely that you pictured some aspect of "difference" among a group. This is the beauty of workplace diversity. Sarah Saska, Co-founder and CEO of diversity consulting firm Feminuity, explains this concept in more detail in an article on [how to define diversity, equity, and inclusion at work](#).

As she puts it, "People aren't diverse, but teams and companies must be. Diversity is a relational concept. It shows up in the composition of teams and organizations, and it is measured based on a collective whole. In this way, diversity refers to 'difference' within a given setting. So while a person is not 'diverse,' they may bring a diverse range of experiences."

The ways in which companies tend to focus on increasing diversity include programs like diversity training on unconscious bias, setting

recruiting pipeline targets for a diverse range of candidates, and supporting employee resource groups. However, the work of diversity doesn't stop when these sorts of programs are implemented. Focusing on inclusion, how people with a range of differences feel valued in the workplace, is paramount to the engagement and retention of employees.

Coaching and mentoring are two developmental programs that, when approached from a perspective of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), build a diverse and inclusive workplace. Furthermore, they support the retention of employees, especially for those from less privileged or underrepresented groups.

Throughout this eBook, we'll explore how coaching and mentoring, as part of your DEI strategy, can help you increase diversity in leadership roles, better retain and attract diverse talent, and create an inclusive working environment. The last section of this eBook will walk you through the details of designing and launching your first coaching and mentoring program for diversity and inclusion.

Take a look at a sampling of research below that shows how building a diverse workplace brings many benefits like new perspectives, increased innovation, and increased profits.

- A [2017 study from online decision-making platform Cloverpop](#) found that diverse teams made better decisions 60% of the time.
- A study in the journal *Financial Management* found that more diverse cultures enhance future innovation potential. This effect is even stronger in times of economic decline.
- [Boston Consulting Group](#) found that increasing the diversity of leadership teams leads to more and better innovation and improved financial performance. In fact, companies with more diverse management teams have 19% higher revenue due to innovation.
- A McKinsey report from 2018, *Delivering through diversity*, reaffirms the positive connection between diversity and company financial performance. In 2014 they found that companies in the top quartile for executive team gender diversity were 15% more likely to experience above-average profitability than companies in the fourth quartile. In 2017 that number increased to 21%.
- A recent study of [S&P 500 companies from Great Place to Work](#) found those with consistently inclusive workplaces earned an annualized return 4x larger than those without a focus on inclusion.

Quick Statistics: Coaching and Mentoring for Diversity

Coaching and mentoring often appear on articles covering the number of ways you can improve company diversity. It's with good reason too, providing this one-on-one relationship to your employees from less privileged or underrepresented groups is a great way to support their growth within your company and beyond.

Here we provide a list of quick statistics on the impact of coaching and mentoring for diversity. This is a great resource to refer to when making the case for developmental budgets.

Mentoring programs make companies' managerial ranks significantly more diverse

In 2016 the Harvard Business Review reported on [Why Diversity Programs Fail](#) and found that,

"On average [mentoring programs] boost the representation of black, Hispanic, and Asian-American women, and Hispanic and Asian-American men, by 9% to 24%.

In industries where plenty of college-educated non-managers are eligible to move up, like chemicals and electronics, mentoring programs also increase the ranks of white women and black men by 10% or more."

Women and people in underrepresented groups feel that mentoring is extremely important to their careers

A 2017 [study on mentoring from executive search firm Heidrick & Struggles](#) found that,

"30% of women said their mentoring relationship was extremely important compared to 23% of men. 32% of minorities found it extremely important, compared with 27% of the overall sample.

Further, minorities were more likely to say they found a mentor on their own at 25% compared to 18% of the overall sample, suggesting their organizations could benefit from establishing tools and forums to help them succeed in finding a mentor."

Mentoring has financial benefits for mentors and mentees and improves retention

In 2006, [researchers from Gartner](#) analyzed data for over 1,000 Sun Microsystems employees across a 5 year period. The study found that,

"25% of employees in a test group who took part in the company's mentoring program had a salary grade change, compared with 5% of employees in a control group who did not participate in the program. The research also showed that the program had positive financial benefits for mentors: 28% of mentors in the test group had a salary grade change as opposed to just 5% in the control group.

Retention rates were much higher for mentees (72%) and mentors (69%) than for employees who did not participate in the mentoring program (49%)."

Increase diversity in leadership roles

The effect of mentoring programs on helping companies achieve racial diversity on their executive teams is the subject of an early 2000s Harvard Business Review article, [*Race Matters*](#). David A. Thomas, Professor Emeritus at Harvard Business School writes, "In my research on the career progression of minorities at U.S. corporations, I have found that whites and minorities follow distinct patterns of advancement. Specifically, promising white professionals tend to enter a fast track early in their careers, whereas high-potential minorities take off much later..."

Thomas' study demonstrates how the path to advancement for people from less privileged or underrepresented groups are often filled with more challenges. He found that people of color who advanced the furthest in their careers all shared a common characteristic - mentors who nurtured their development.

Race is but one aspect to consider when deciding how to increase diversity in leadership roles. Other factors to consider include: age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, veteran status, able bodiedness, and neurodiversity (used to describe people with autism, dyslexia, ADHD and other neurological conditions). Having a more diverse leadership team communicates to your company that diversity is valued and there's a path to leadership for everyone.

What about Diversity of Thought?

The concept of diversity of thought (also referred to as cognitive diversity) is the idea that people don't need to look different or be part of an underrepresented group in order to bring diverse perspectives. While diverse thinking is a good thing, it is achieved as an outcome of diverse representation. Focusing on diversity of thought irrespective of diverse representation downplays the real benefits of a workplace that is diverse in age, gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Most studies on the benefits of workplace diversity focus on one or more of these factors, not solely diversity of thought.



To assess your starting point for increasing diversity in leadership roles, consider the following:

Who do you consider leadership?

- Executive teams, VP, and Director level roles are common evaluations
- It's important to make this distinction clear if you plan to share goals around how you are planning to increase diversity in leadership

As of today, what is the diversity on your leadership team?

- This could involve how many people represent different races, ages, genders, ethnicities, and sexual orientations.
- In the United States, companies of 100 or more employees need to report on the racial/ethnic and gender composition of their workforce by specific job categories in an EEO-1 filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.
- However, some measures of diversity are only revealed when an employee provides this information by choice. This data could be in your HRIS if people have chosen to disclose it. You can also run an independent survey asking people to disclose this information, letting them know it will be used to improve the diversity, equity, and inclusion at your company.

What is the diversity of your pipeline for future leadership?

- Look at both internal and external sources. Internal are those employees you already have that could move into leadership roles and external are those you would hire directly into leadership.

When it comes to the diversity of your pipeline for future leadership, coaching and mentoring can support people's development earlier in their careers, leading to increased diversity in leadership roles. Coaching and mentoring can also be a great support to employees who currently hold leadership roles by providing them with one-on-one guidance they may not otherwise receive.

In addition to providing coaching and mentoring opportunities to develop current employees, coaching and mentoring can be leveraged to better attract and retain diverse talent.



Better attract and retain diverse talent

From the moment a candidate interacts with your company, they're getting a signal about how you value DEI. Often, this starts with the application and interview process. The language you use in job descriptions can influence the type of people who apply.

Dr. A Breeze Harper, Founder of Critical Diversity Solutions [shares an example](#) of using the phrase, "influential networks" in a job description. "Usually, it's not the case that in historically marginalized communities in terms of race and ethnicity that you're going to find a high number of people with these conventional influential connections," says Dr. Harper, who advises a reframing of this requirement.

Unconscious bias training for employees, especially those involved in hiring, can be an effective tool for attracting and retaining diverse talent. Effective trainings set the stage for DEI work as an ongoing process and give employees practical strategies to be more inclusive.

Discuss with candidates the opportunity to receive coaching or mentoring as a professional development benefit, and once they're on board, do the work to retain them over time.

Development opportunities like mentoring and coaching are the key to retention because they show employees you're invested in their growth. According to [LinkedIn's 2018 Workforce Learning Report](#), 94% of employees would stay at their company longer if they invested in their career development.

It's no surprise that Deloitte's [2016 annual Millennial Survey](#) found that millennials intending to stay with an organization for longer than five years were twice as likely to have a mentor (68%)

than not (32%). In their [2020 survey](#), two thirds of millennials reported that their company supports development through training and mentorship, a notable increase from prior years.

It's not only those who are receiving coaching and mentoring that are more likely to stay, it's those providing mentorship as well. In the Sun Microsystems study referenced in the Quick Statistics page, retention rates were not only higher for mentees (72%) but also mentors (69%).

One of the best ways to know if your employees intend to stay or leave is simply to ask them. Collecting employee feedback at scale can be accomplished using online surveys. You could ask, "Do you have a clear understanding of career pathing within this company?" to understand whether or not people know what development opportunities are available to them. Including a question like, "I still see myself at this company in two years time" cross referenced with programmatic information can provide useful insights, like how employees who receive coaching and mentoring over time are intending to stay, and the rate at which they leave.

Looking for more advice on writing inclusive job descriptions?

Check out [Can Your Job Posting Attract Diverse Candidates?](#) from SHRM

Create an inclusive working environment

Creating workplace diversity and inclusion doesn't happen overnight. This is not meant to deter you - what's important is that you start somewhere. Socialize your plan to create a more diverse and inclusive company, measure your progress, and share your learnings to continually improve.

Common steps to take to create a more inclusive working environment include:

- Diversity training (like unconscious bias workshops)
- Recruiting pipeline targets
- Encouraging a culture of open feedback
- Workplace culture surveys
- Supporting employee resource groups
- Providing mentoring and coaching opportunities

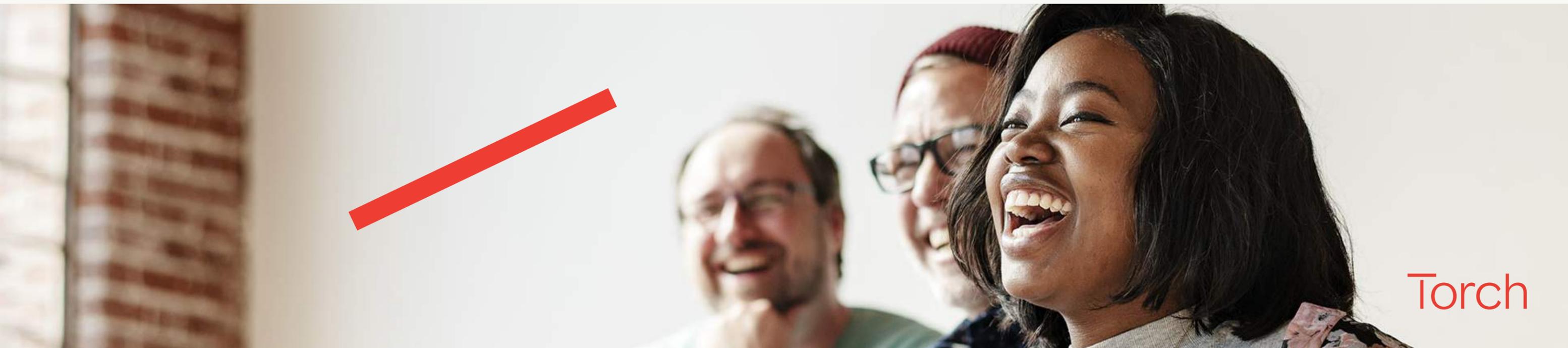
We'll dive a bit deeper into these last two steps starting with mentoring opportunities. Harvard Business Review's 2016 article on [Why Diversity Programs Fail](#) reveals, "While white men tend to find mentors on their own, women and minorities more often need help from formal programs.

One reason...is that white male executives don't feel comfortable reaching out informally to young women and minority men. Yet they are eager to mentor assigned protégés, and women and minorities are often first to sign up for mentors."

This is one reason why structured mentoring and coaching programs can allow you to more intentionally create an inclusive working environment. Building relationships among your diverse workforce helps to build understanding, value of differences, and ultimately, inclusion.

Employee resource groups (ERGs) are independent employee-led groups that also support a diverse and inclusive workplace. They are often aligned around an aspect of identity, like LGBTQ or Women of Color. Take T-Mobile for example, where employees have the option to join six different ERGs. According to Holli Martinez, [Head of Diversity and Inclusion](#), "In 2017, retention rates were significantly higher among employees who actively participated in our D&I network."

Especially in larger organizations, ERGs often run mentoring programs for their members. This added benefit, while impactful, can sometimes run into roadblocks if employees feel that they lack the support or infrastructure to scale mentoring to all who are seeking it. This is another reason why offering mentoring and coaching through structured programs leads to a more diverse and inclusive workplace.





Launching your first coaching and mentoring program for diversity and inclusion

Coaching and mentoring are two related but distinct programs that you can deploy to support your diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Coaching is a learning and development modality in which a trained executive coach works with a leader to identify the leader's DEI related strengths and challenges, sets goals related to the larger DEI initiatives of the organization, and ideally tracks goal progress with the help of ongoing feedback from colleagues.

Mentoring for DEI initiatives is built on a relationship between a mentor and a leader. However, mentoring relationships tend to be less assessment and goal-oriented, and more focused on building a strong bond between the mentor and the leader so that the leader can feel supported by the mentor's expertise and wisdom. Mentors also differ from coaches in that they tend to draw more from their professional experience, and mentors tend to be farther along in their career relative to their clients, which gives the mentor additional credibility and valuable context.

When using coaching or mentoring to achieve your DEI objectives, it's important that the recipients of these experiences are themselves a diverse group of people. In the sections below, we'll discuss how to create programs that serve diverse participants.

To design the right approach to coaching and mentoring for DEI at your company, follow these five steps.

1 Select the approach that fits your goals

Coaching and mentoring are typically used to support DEI in several ways. One approach aims to help employees cultivate a greater sense of belonging and satisfaction at work, leading to higher levels of engagement. This approach is more common when the goal is to increase retention of employees who identify as women, Black, indigenous or as people of color. Mentoring is typically a better fit for this approach.

Mentoring is also appropriate if your goal is to increase diversity in leadership at your organization. [Research shows](#) that implicit bias in the workplace reduces the likelihood that employees from underrepresented groups will be selected for open positions versus their white and/or male counterparts. A mentor can help your hiring managers implement best practices designed to increase diversity, such as using scripted interviews, creating diverse search committees, and requiring that at least one candidate from an underrepresented group is interviewed for each role.

If your goal is focused on creating an inclusive working environment, your approach might focus on helping employees navigate challenging issues around race with greater fluency and skill. Building such skill requires cultivating self-awareness by setting specific goals and tracking progress with ongoing feedback from colleagues. This approach is often a better fit for coaching, and is most common when your goal is to establish greater equity and inclusion within the workplace.

2 Determine your leadership competency model

At its core, a competency model describes what you want your people to do well. It identifies the specific abilities or behaviors that you want your team to develop through coaching and/or mentoring. Large organizations typically have DEI competency models in place, but don't often translate them into specific target behaviors or provide opportunities for team members to practice new skills and strategies. Coaching and mentoring are ideal programs in which to deepen awareness and develop new skills. Without these programs, most managers and leaders revert to their habitual way of doing things.



3 Select participants

In selecting participants for your program, it's important to create a diverse candidate pool. You can do this by "oversampling" candidates from under represented groups. Oversampling means including more participants from a particular group in your candidate pool than you will ultimately select for participation in a coaching or mentoring program. Oversampling will ideally result in a candidate pool that is more diverse than your company, and should lead to a highly diverse group of participants in your programs. Employees from underrepresented groups are often overlooked for coaching and mentoring due to a variety of factors related to implicit bias, and oversampling can help correct for this.

It's also important to look for personality traits that make leaders in these categories a good fit for coaching or mentoring. One standout trait is a growth mindset: the belief that you can become a better leader through hard work, better skill, and helpful input from others. We've done research with thousands of leaders at high growth companies. Our 2019 data set shows that clients with a growth mindset, particularly those willing to have their coach or mentor push them just beyond their comfort zone, are more than twice as engaged as clients who are not open to moving outside their comfort zone.

Our data also show that the employees who are most open to the process get the most from coaching and mentoring. Employees who begin these programs excited to develop their leadership skills go on to report greater satisfaction with their coach or mentor, and spend more time on coaching-related activities than clients who are skeptical of the value of coaching. Therefore, consider selecting participants who show evidence of high motivation, openness, and flexibility. Here's one final point to keep in mind: these programs work best when participation is optional, not required. Leaders who are required to take part in coaching or mentoring may see it as a work assignment and lose the intrinsic motivation needed for a successful outcome.

4 Launch your first cohort

It's important to be intentional with the launch of your first mentoring or coaching cohort. Targeting key leaders to join your mentor pool is an important part of this process. It's exciting for employees to get the chance to see who they will be mentored by, especially when they are influential company leaders. External mentors, like those in Torch's community of 6000+ mentors and coaches, can also provide valuable support to company leaders.

It's important for the duration of the first cohort to be long enough for each leader to establish a strong working relationship with their coach or mentor, gain insight into strengths and challenges, set preliminary goals, and begin to make reasonable progress on goals. Our data show that leaders make statistically significant positive changes across multiple skill domains in approximately 6-7 months of coaching or mentoring, which is a good timeframe for an initial cohort.

Before launching your first cohort, you should also consult with executives for sponsorship of the program and any ERG leaders as well. Executives and ERG leaders can help you build the groundswell of excitement around your new mentoring or coaching program. ERG leaders in particular can help you understand what challenges they've faced with mentoring so you can plan to overcome them with a formal program.

Launching with a strong communication strategy that focuses on your pool of mentors and support from executives and any ERG groups at your company will set you up for success.

[Learn how to create diverse cohorts for coaching and mentoring on our blog.](#)

We examine how your participant selection process, feelings of psychological safety around nominations, how you define high potential talent, where participants are located and their demographic identities all influence the composition of your coaching or mentoring cohort.

Torch

Get Started with Mentoring and Coaching

When created with intention, coaching and mentoring programs can go a long way towards increasing diversity in leadership roles, better attracting and retaining diverse talent, and creating an inclusive working environment.

At Torch, our integrated platform for Learning and Development leaders is built to help you deliver, manage, and measure employee growth at scale. We'd love to support your company in becoming a more diverse and inclusive place.

[Contact Us](#)



"Torch is helping us evolve our approach to mentorship. The amazing technology and staff make for a highly-collaborative experience, providing tools and support, as well as analytics that help us tell the story of how our people are learning and growing together. It's inspiring."

John Hardy

Diversity & Inclusion Sr. Manager,
Experiential Learning