

Unconscious Bias Training

Beacon Hill's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Taskforce, in partnership with MCG Partners and DEI Consultant Demetriouse Russell, held our first companywide unconscious bias training earlier this year. The training, which was offered in six hourlong sessions, was designed to learn about unconscious biases, as well as discover how our biases affect our decision-making. Following the training, we spoke with Demetriouse, as well as Senior Associate Ronald Taylor II – who conducted a portion of the sessions – to ask for their feedback.

“From an early stage, it was clear to me that Beacon Hill leadership was not interested in a ‘check the box’ solution,” remarked Demetriouse. “When we conducted our initial survey in November 2021, one of the questions we asked participants is ‘Do you feel discriminated against?’ There was about a 6% affirmative rate for Beacon Hill. Most organizations would look at that and say ‘Okay, 94% of the people don’t think that that’s the case’ – but the fact that Andy was outraged by that tells me everything I want to know... When you get that kind of response, you know you are working with the right leadership.”

“We definitely do these presentations often, but I would say our experience [with Beacon Hill] stayed in my memory,” noted Ronald. “Everybody across the board was very receptive...In our breakout sessions, there were some amazing stories shared by women and women of color who had felt exclusion, and that brings to light some of those issues, [whether it be a] ‘the gentleman’s club culture’ or you have these pockets of people in an organization who don’t *want* to engage with the majority. I think that [type of session] brings a lot when it comes to shedding light on those dynamics, but also how to overcome them... I think Beacon Hill was good about showing us that side, and being able to be vulnerable in talking about their own experiences. It brings about a period where people can reflect and say ‘how can I now use that vulnerability to enact change and improve my experience at Beacon Hill.’”

Ronald also explained that the unconscious bias training works as a “feeler” presentation – it reveals where a company is with its own metrics, and how it defines diversity, equity and inclusion. The sessions gauge how willing people are to share their experience, as well as how receptive the group is to that information. In this respect, both Ronald and Demetriouse commented on the readiness of the Beacon Hill team to engage. That being said – there still remains work to be done.

“From our survey, we knew that Beacon Hill Staffing was above average when it came to team cohesion, collaboration, and acceptance of DEI... these metrics were all in the 80s,” commented Demetriouse. “We don’t typically see scores that high. We tried to dig into the data to see what made Beacon Hill different. We attributed it to two factors – one; generationally, which correlates to a greater degree of openness towards diversity, equity and inclusion, and two; a high degree of homogeneity. Less than 10% of the staff is made up of people of color. If it’s a small group, then those individuals may be less willing to share their whole experience due to fear of retribution. You may get an inflated number, because some segments may be holding back.”

The companywide unconscious bias training provided an initial building block for Beacon Hill towards a more diverse, equitable and inclusive workforce. Not only did it establish our readiness for change, but also noted the ways in which we can progress. Now, we must not rest on our laurels, however inclined we may be to – on the contrary, this is only the beginning. We must amplify the qualities that push us forward, while also being diligent in leaving behind the qualities that hold us back. We must be studious in identifying the ways our organizational characteristics mean different things to different team members, and that in order to uplift all of us we must be careful not to leave anyone behind. We must – each one of us – stand on the promises of trust, decency, honesty and mutual respect, and depend on each other to be

accountable to them. With these tenants in mind, we can move forward, ensuring that every single one of us can be proud to be a Beacon Hiller.

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“[Unconscious bias training] is sort of a ‘feeler’ presentation,” added Ron. “You really get a sense of where a company is with its own metrics, and how they define diversity, equity and inclusion. Unconscious bias training is a good way to measure [openness], see how people receive that information, and ultimately how they treat each other in the microcosm of interactions between their colleagues and their managers.”

“We want to work with companies where the CEO wants this more than we do,” noted Demetriouse. “That’s what impressed us about Andy, Amy and Brian – they really pushed us. They didn’t want a watered-down version, they wanted to include stuff that would get people thinking about this topic in a meaningful way. That was the challenge that they put down for us, that we were happy to step up to.”

“Particularly with staffing agencies, and with commission-based organizations, there’s an idea of it being a meritocracy – ‘you get what you earn, you’ll get into the places that you’re get to.’ But we need to stop and think about how the people with lower numbers got into the same room as the people who have had to work more and be consistent, and at times suppress sides of themselves in order to be in the same room. I think that is a dynamic we see across many different firms, many different industries. How do you surmount that? We talked in the table-setting part of the training about equity and inclusion – the ability to meet people where they are at, rather than having a blanket company statement. Sometimes, there are levels of access that certain employees might or might not have that equals that bare minimum.”

“[Beacon Hill] is a very young workforce. The majority of that bell curve are in the Millennial generation and under. I think that generation is looking at Diversity, Equity and Inclusion differently... my generation certainly wasn’t. Boomers, Gen Xers – we aren’t looking at social justice in the same way.”

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“The key thing here is the mindset shift. What we want to see is people thinking differently about this myth of meritocracy, and understand that maybe some people have certain privileges that others don’t. I can pound my fist in a meeting, or raise my voice, without fear of retribution. It shows up in those ways, but it also shows up at Top of the Hill and President’s Club – who’s hanging out with who? Am I in the in-group, or am I in the out-group? You can then see those patterns emerge. The shift we are looking for is DEI becomes part of Beacon Hill’s cultural DNA.”