

August 29, 2019

# BUILDING INCLUSIVE LEADERS: MEN AS ALLIES FOR WOMEN LEADERS

By Anna Marie Valerio



*This post is part of a series about using the Giving Voice to Values method to help leaders become more inclusive and cultivate more diverse organizations. Read the previous post here. (<https://blog.hrps.org/blogpost/Building-Inclusive-Leaders-Voicing-the-Value-of-Inclusion>) For more on Giving Voice to Values, read the Summer 2019 issue of (<https://www.hrps.org/resources/people-strategy-journal/Summer2019/Pages/default.aspx>) People + Strategy (<https://www.hrps.org/resources/people-strategy-journal/Summer2019/Pages/default.aspx>).*

Organizational mission statements, values, strategies, policies and practices, and ethics guidelines are structures supporting the success of the organization. What role do the behaviors of top leaders play as reinforcements for these structures? What are the leader behaviors that demonstrate the value of inclusion?

What are the behaviors of senior leaders who are known as inclusive leaders? How do senior men and women leaders and STEM leaders voice the value of inclusion to their teams?

How might others learn from the ones who have figured out the behaviors needed to operationalize inclusion? When these inclusive leaders “give voice to their values,” their words, actions key behaviors and help to accelerate the learning of inclusive behaviors by others.

Given the statistics on the numbers of women at the top of organizations in the foreseeable future, there is a strong likelihood that women in general management and STEM will report to male bosses. “Best practice” trends for managers have included training initiatives in emotional intelligence, unconscious bias, and a focus on developing empathy and more collaborative behaviors, particularly as newer generations are entering the workforce.

Recent research has shown that mentoring is the most effective learning methodology to increase diversity and inclusion (D&I) at work, in comparison with other diversity initiatives. What, then, may be the impact of learning from values-driven inclusive leaders who are mentors to others? Taking it a step further, what may be the impact of these values-driven top leaders, particularly for the vast majority of those who would like to give voice to their values but need to actually see and hear examples of how to do it?

### **Values as a Starting Point**

Prior research has identified leaders (male champions) who place an important value on fairness, equity, and talent development in their organizations. Such leaders are motivated to take actions that will benefit the organization as a whole. They play an important role in mentoring, coaching, and providing other key approaches in developing women leaders. Not surprisingly, they are easily identified by women leaders who wish to work with them in their organizations.

What makes these male leaders effective at fostering inclusion in their organizations? They demonstrate how to align values and behavior to foster inclusive cultures.

### **Values and Behaviors that Support Inclusion**

Key themes and behaviors have emerged from interviews with female-nominated male leaders, known to be inclusive leaders, and women leaders who are at or near the C-suite in *Fortune* 500 organizations. Their titles include: CEO, President, Executive Vice President, Senior Vice-President, Chief Operations Officer, Chief Human Resources Officer, Chief Learning Officer. Thirty of these confidential interviews were conducted with senior male and female STEM leaders (Chief Information Officer, Chief Technology Officer). (For more details, see *Gender Inclusion by Top Leaders: Evidence and Positive Actions* ([https://www.hrps.org/resources/Documents/white%20paper\\_valerio\\_4-19\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.hrps.org/resources/Documents/white%20paper_valerio_4-19_FINAL.pdf)).

Key themes that have emerged from the research include two that are related to the values of fairness and equity and lend themselves to using GVW methodology to foster gender inclusion. These themes are:

- **Benefitting Own Team and the Overall Organization.** The behaviors associated with this theme include balancing the numbers of men and women on teams, encouraging males to be mentors to talented women, and examining talent development processes for hidden biases.
- **Showing the Courage to Overcome Resistance to Gender Inclusion.** The behaviors associated with this second theme include speaking up when disparaging sexist remarks are made or when others show biases and prejudice.

Team meetings, succession planning meetings, and performance rating sessions presented opportunities for these leaders to give voice to their values. In these confidential interviews many leaders found the need to speak up to address biases and inequities that others revealed during discussions. When backlash and resistance to inclusion occurred, these leaders were ready and responded with clear messages of the value of inclusion.

Many of the behaviors practiced by inclusive leaders may serve as a starting point for others and lend themselves to using the GVV methodology. GVV asks the questions:

- What if I were going to act on my values?
- What would I say and do?
- How could I be most effective?

Group meetings and rating sessions are likely opportunities for leaders to voice their values. Many top leaders have learned how to bridge the gap between values and behaviors and how to call out bad behaviors when they occur. Might these examples of inclusive behaviors from senior leaders, paired with practicing the GVV methodology, accelerate inclusion in organizations? It may be worth a try.

The importance of taking a stand for inclusion has implications for trust and teamwork. According to Thomas Aloia, Professor of Surgical Oncology and Head of the Institute for Cancer Care Innovation at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, "As a leader, what you permit, you promote."

The Authors:

**Anna Marie Valerio, Ph.D.**, is President of Executive Leadership Strategies and author of *Developing Women Leaders: A Guide for Men and Women in Organizations* and *Executive Coaching: A Guide for the HR Professional*.

**Tags:** gender equality diversity & inclusion leadership development leadership HR strategy