BUILDING AN inclusive organizational culture that values integrity, respect, diversity and teamwork above all else has unlocked incredible value for HARMAN. We hire the best talent, who in turn unlock innovations and services that enhance the lives of millions of our customers around the world. I believe deeply that diversifying our organization across gender, geography, culture, age and experience has been the single most important component to our organization’s transformation and success over the past 10 years.

Diversity is a very important — and personal — mission for me, as an immigrant to America many years ago, as the father of a son and daughter who are now now making their way in the professional world, and as the CEO of a global technology company that depends on innovation and connectivity for its livelihood.

When we know there is direct correlation between diversity and profitability and value creation, it’s incumbent upon us to prioritize and pursue it vigorously.

I recognize, however, that inclusion doesn’t come easily. People carry preconceived notions, often unintentionally or subconsciously, about those that may look, sound or act different from them. Establishing programs and resources that help employees identify and overcome bias should be at the top of the agenda of every corporate leader.

First, acknowledge and remove obstacles to inclusiveness.

Unconscious bias is a silent killer — and it’s not just a human resources problem.

Voluntary training drives progress: Studies show the positive effects of diversity training rarely last beyond a day or two and suggest that it can even activate bias or spark backlash. Voluntary training evokes the opposite response — the feeling that “I chose to show up, so I must be pro-diversity.” (Harvard Business Review)

At HARMAN, our first step was to recognize and admit that biases exist and ask our team to step up to address them head-on. Like others, we have rolled out a program to teach managers about its existence, equip them

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with strategies for spotting troublesome situations and provide them the tools to handle these situations accordingly.

**Second, walk the talk. Training and seminars inform, but we must lead through our actions.**

Engagement and inclusiveness are closely related. Engaged employees are more likely to say their company values diverse ideas. (Gallup study)

HARMAN has developed a number of programs that facilitate global collaboration. We established a task force of high performers on a fast track, assembling them into global working groups outside their focus industry to execute complex organizational projects. We also launched the HARMAN Women’s Network to educate and engage all employees in diversity and inclusion efforts beyond gender issues. Furthermore, we made it a requirement that anyone at the executive level have experience working outside of their home country for an extended period of time. Today, on average, each member of the HARMAN management team has worked in three countries.

**Third, invite debate. Fear and complacency are poisonous; disruption and disagreement are liberating.**

When I joined HARMAN, I noticed a company with an insular board and management team, no human resources function, and little accountability. These issues were clearly limiting the company’s ability to innovate and grow. In one of my first moves, I reshaped the board and management team, bringing in female leaders from different countries (China, Israel, Germany, India and more) and expanded the company’s mix of professional experience.

**Fourth, in the war for talent, win at home.**

Issues of retention and engagement have risen to No. 2 in the minds of business leaders, second only to the challenge of building global leadership. We must recognize that there’s great untapped potential in demographic groups that may not be reached by our traditional channels. Research shows that mentoring programs within organizations boosted minority and female representation in management on average by 9–24 percent. (Harvard Business Review)

HARMAN invests significant resources in professional development groups that have aided the career trajectory of many of our executives, including our CFO Sandy Rowland and SVP of Procurement Jessica Garvey. In addition, female leaders hold top-ranking positions today across our company, including legal, strategy, talent, tax and intellectual property.

**Finally, reinforce diversity and inclusion as competitive growth advantages.**

Diversity and inclusion are best approached with a top-down AND bottom-up strategy. While it’s imperative that diversity and inclusion initiatives are embraced by C-suite executives, the strategies must be embodied by employees at every level. Corporations should implement ongoing programs that encourage employees to listen to, learn from and engage with other cultures and one another.
Short-Term Actions

- **Actively engage employees at all levels around all issues**
  Encourage participation in diversity issues that aren't their own.

- **Become culturally competent**
  Take the time to learn about different cultures, races, religions and backgrounds by sharing stories and celebrating different customs throughout the year.

- **Proactively seek out different viewpoints**
  Balance the sources where you get your news and information.

Long-Term Actions

- **Create ongoing diversity and inclusion employee engagement programs**
  Make diversity and inclusion part of day-to-day operations through regular employee surveys and co-mentorship programs.

- **Value diversity and inclusion as a “performance driver”**
  Beyond recruiting and marketing, consider representation and engagement in individual and department key performance indicators.

With commitment to bold actions and a tone set from the top, diversity has become a powerful competitive advantage at HARMAN. Because of our ability to harness the creativity of our people, we continue to win big partnerships with virtually all global automakers and the biggest tech companies in the world. We maintain high retention rates, earn most innovative companies honors and customer service awards, and achieve industry-leading financial performance.

Still, we realize we have room to grow. For companies, communities and economies to achieve sustainable success, we need for everyone to be engaged — to leverage our diversity and build inclusive cultures that stimulate collaboration, productivity and invention.

Diversity and inclusion is not about philanthropy; it's about sustainability. It's not about compliance; it's about competitiveness. Our future depends on the competency and creativity of those who will lead our organizations, industries and the world after us. Change is on us.

[www.harman.com](http://www.harman.com)