It comes down to one word: inclusion. You have to leave boundaries behind. By going outside your usual scope, you find diversity of thought and experience. Those differences make people bolder, more open to ideas, more willing to explore the provocative. That’s where innovation happens.

You can’t be what you can’t see

“It is the policy of this organization to hire people who have the personality, talent and background necessary to fill a given job, regardless of race, color or creed.”

These words were written by Thomas Watson, Jr., in 1953, a decade before the Civil Rights Act, in his now famous Policy Letter #4. It was the first corporate statement of its kind and truly groundbreaking for its time. In the years that followed, this policy was expanded to cover religion, sex, gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, national origin, genetics, disability and age.

IBM’s rich history and commitment to diversity, inclusion and equal rights began well over 100 years ago and remains a point of pride for us today. Our predecessor companies hired the first African American and female employees in 1899, and IBM promoted our first female vice president in 1943 and offered family-friendly benefits in the 1950s.

At IBM, diversity isn’t a human resources responsibility, it’s a strategic imperative owned by the business to fuel innovation.

Among our many initiatives, IBM executives across all geographies and business units take part in Executive Diversity Councils, which are charged with improving diversity in the leadership pipeline and executive representation. We sponsor Tech Re-Entry, a program designed to bring mid-level technical women who have been out of the workforce for at least two years back into technical roles. We also host a program called Reconnections, which brings IBM alumni, including women and executives of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, back to the company, and a Pathways to Technical Leadership initiative to help women move into technical executive roles, especially as distinguished engineers. In 2016, the program expanded to include underrepresented minority men.

At IBM, fostering inclusion is demonstrated in both traditional and nontraditional ways. For example, IBM has deployed an innovative breast milk delivery service for nursing
mothers in the United States. We recently increased paid parental leave for IBM birth mothers to 20 weeks, and we doubled paid parental leave for fathers, partners and adoptive parents to 12 weeks. To help with flexibility, IBM parents can choose to take the bonding leave any time during the first year after the birth or adoption. IBM also provides benefits coverage for same-gender couples in 50 countries.

I’m proud to say the efforts of IBMers to bring a culture of inclusion to everything we do has won our company a number of diversity awards, including:

- **Catalyst Award**: Leading the Cognitive Era Powered by the Global Advancement of Women. IBM is the only company to have won the award four times.
- **Working Mother**: 100 Best Companies and Best Companies for Multicultural Women.
- **Human Rights Campaign**: Best Places to Work.
- **Military Friendly**: Employer of the Year.

Our commitment to diversity and inclusion extends to our external advocacy. We push forward every day to provide stability, reassurance and support for our employees through public policy. Proudly, we have led business advocacy efforts to stop anti-LGBT “bathroom bills” in Texas and North Carolina, among other states.

And since late 2017, we have stood up in support of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, leading the business community’s efforts to urge the U.S. Congress to pass a permanent legislative solution allowing Dreamers to legally live, work and study in the United States. We have even brought a number of IBM Dreamers to Capitol Hill to meet with policymakers and share their personal stories. These Dreamers embody what inclusion truly means, and we continue to support them and the important contributions they make to our company and our communities.

As we look toward the future, we believe that diversity, inclusion and engagement allow us to bring our best talents to bear as we continue on our transformation journey. They are essential components of our corporate values and are tightly integrated into our business strategy. It is in this spirit that IBM consciously builds inclusive teams and encourages diversity of ideas to have the greatest impact for our clients, our colleagues and the world.

[www-03.ibm.com/employment/inclusion/](http://www-03.ibm.com/employment/inclusion/)