

# PERSPECTIVES ON EQUITY AND INCLUSION



BY JIM ZANIELLO

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are not going to just show up in our associations without work. It takes conscious thought, at every level of an organization, to seek creative solutions as well as

to find staff, executives, and board members to ensure we represent all voices.

Over the past year, FSAE has been a thought leader on these topics for its members. It charged the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force to create an action plan to encourage and grow a diverse and inclusive membership and engagement of members in the organization. It also collaborated with **Vetted Solutions**, an executive search firm, on a diversity and inclusion report specific to FSAE members to establish a comparison baseline as the focus on such efforts continues to increase.

Having had the honor of moderating a panel at FSAE's recent Annual Conference on these topics, I was encouraged by the robust conversation and thoughtful comments. Many in the audience shared their own stories and offered advice upon what their associations are currently doing. **Heather Armstrong**, *Executive Director of Recycle*

*Florida Today*, provided insights on how CEOs can include additional perspectives and ensure that an organization is representative of its members, including:

- 1. Don't be afraid to present the tough questions!** As leaders, it's our responsibility to present information that may not be the easiest discussion items. Be open and willing to taking the lead.
- 2. Have written policies and document for support.** Having written policies and procedures in place can make conversations much easier to have and to know if advance of what you should do.
- 3. Understand what diversity and inclusion is for your organization.** Make sure that you and your Board leadership have a basic understanding of what this means for the culture of your organization. No two people or associations are alike.

**Veronica Catoe**, *Chief Operating Officer of Florida Assisted Living Association*, shared her ideas on the role senior staff play in ensuring that equity and inclusion efforts permeate through the entire organization, stating: "participants feel there is a need to increase diversity and inclusion in their organizations, and since they may not be the decision makers

CONTINUED PAGE 30

percent of the hands go up. To identify your purpose, think about where you are the most gifted; what you would do if you knew you wouldn't fail and you had the money to do it; and what you are most passionate about. Knowing your WHY brings meaning and fulfillment.

**2. THEY CONSISTENTLY REBRANDED THEMSELVES.**

Whether you believe it or not, all of us have a brand. Your brand is 'who you are' and 'what others know/say about you.' It's how you present yourself and the impression and aura that you leave. In essence, it's your communication skills. This is particularly important in your career because hiring, promotions, new assignments, and performance decisions are made based on what others know about you. If you don't know your brand, ask your friends, colleagues, co-workers, and your direct supervisor and start reinventing your brand.

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**3. THEY BUILT AND CAPITALIZED ON STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIPS AND ALLIANCES.**

It's been said that "your network, can determine your net worth." Evaluate your inner circle to determine whether you are surrounded by N.I.O.P.s (negative influences of other people) or O.Q.Ps (only quality people), and establish diverse and mutually beneficial relationships that will enable your success.

Reinventing yourself is not just another buzz word, nor is it a fad. It is a journey, and a real solution to the realities of life that both organizations and individuals will inevitably face. Those who respond proactively and intentionally will be better positioned to enjoy the best of times even when the worst of times hit. And those who do not, will become irrelevant and left behind. ♦

they are looking for ways to get leaders to address the issues. Also, there is a lot of focus on internal D&I but we should also be looking at policies/practices that are external with our members to increase awareness and sensitivity."

**Dr. James Pogue**, a multi-generational and unconscious bias expert, guided the audience through an exercise to show how our experiences shape our perspectives, which led to some surprising revelations.

According to FSAE's report, *Diversity and Inclusion: Opportunities to Advance*, more than 90 percent of the survey respondents believe diversity and inclusion efforts definitely or probably contribute to a more successful association. **The survey delves into the challenges small-staff associations have when incorporating diversity, equity and inclusion principles, and concrete steps into their everyday experiences.** It's important for all associations to remember that equity and inclusion are not just tied to staff employment. It is vital to include these values in the association's governing principles and documents, its board and volunteer leadership opportunities, and its programs and partnerships.

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FSAE's Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Task Force was well-represented in the audience by **Adrienne Bryant**, who encourages all with interest to join the Task Force. This important effort will not succeed without support and volunteers from FSAE members.

This is a conversation FSAE plans to continue for the long-term - to help its members stay abreast of best practices, provide resources to incorporate them into the associations' standard ways of operating, and act as a sounding board for questions and advice. ♦

Download *Diversity and Inclusion: Opportunities to Advance* at <http://bit.ly/FSAE-DI>

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