



April 15, 2020

### **Diversity Apocalypse**

At a recent national diversity and inclusion conference, I addressed a gathering of more than 1,000 human resource and diversity professionals from organizations throughout the country. For decades, these professionals have talked about and demonstrated how differing perspectives in the workplace could improve innovation and problem-solving. But today, some of those differences are setting up opposing camps. Diversity, in the form of differences in thoughts, opinions, and beliefs, is now being used by some to divide. Therefore companies, communities, and our country need courageous and authentic leaders more than ever before. These are the leaders who make the places where we work, live, and play more inclusive for everyone regardless of their dimension of diversity. They create an environment where people can work toward a common goal by asking tough questions, expressing themselves fearlessly, bringing their whole selves to work and knowing that they are valued and respected and being listened to as a contributor. This is how innovation, progress, and change happen.

Yet too many companies still approach “diversity and inclusion” as a program or initiative when they should be viewing every process and goal of their organizations through a holistic culture change lens. It takes more than winning awards, increasing numbers, checking boxes, and targeting ads to create a company or community where excellence is achieved through inclusion. It takes engaged individuals with the courage to create a platform for change—authentic leaders—at every level of management.

In my upcoming book “*Beyond Inclusion: The Search for Civility, Compassion, and Common Sense*,” I discuss the role of diversity professionals to cultivate authentic and courageous individuals who can identify, develop and advance the next generation of leaders. They, and the people they bring on board, will become a company’s best hope for enriching its workforce with talent that may have otherwise been overlooked.

Today’s complex problems demand a variety of issues be solved, and companies that do not value an array of perspectives will usher in a “diversity apocalypse” where the organization will lose growth opportunities and suppress innovation. It’s going to be up courageous and competent diversity leaders to help companies conduct challenging

discussions about barriers to inclusion, provide resources to combat bias and systemic discrimination, and refocus efforts to bring about real progress and sustainable change in the organization.