

LEADERSHIP DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

# Why We Need To Stop Talking About Diversity Of Thought

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*I write about culture, equity and belonging in the workplace.*

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As the topic of hiring a diverse workforce continues to make its way into more corporate discussions and conference agendas, the concept of “diversity of thought” keeps getting conflated with this

work. [Diversity of thought](#) is the idea that people in a group don't need to look different or identify with an underrepresented group in order to bring varying, diverse viewpoints to the table. While this is technically true, it is a risky concept to find comfort in.

Diversity of thought is one outcome of successful diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts, but should not be the target in itself. By focusing on diversity of thought, we may distract ourselves from the real reasons we need to be focusing on DEI initiatives, and the internal culture shifts required to move the needle in a sustainable way.

Working towards diverse representation—as opposed to diversity of thought—in our companies is important for a few core reasons.

### **Employees Should Represent Customers**

In order to create business models and build products that serve all customers, a critical mass of employees who represent the many identities of customers is needed. Having varying experiences and perspectives isn't a shortcut to understanding what customers experience. The importance of employee representation reflecting customers has been proven many times over, such as the crash test dummies that didn't factor in [safety for female bodies](#) or soap dispensers that [didn't recognize dark skin](#).

### **Work Towards More Equitable Systems**

There is plenty of data that shows that [diversity increases the bottom line](#). But that isn't the only reason so many organizations are investing in DEI efforts—it's also the right thing to do. There are many systems of oppression that have formed today's society, and corporate leaders have the opportunity to work towards dismantling these systems. This can be done by [creating equitable](#)

[opportunities](#) that address the different barriers that people have faced. A focus on diversity of thought can be a distraction from the work that should be done to break down systemic inequities.

## Foster Belonging Through Diversity

Employees who don't see their identities reflected in their workplace feel a lower sense of belonging, and that can lead to [higher churn and lower productivity](#). Creating a corporate culture where employees feel safe bringing their best selves to work requires the fostering of a strong sense of belonging for all employees. A room full of diversity of thought won't make someone from an underrepresented population feel that they belong—but there are many [efforts that can help increase belonging](#).

Increasing company diversity starts with hiring and is fully realized through the culture that employees experience. To do this correctly, it is essential to remember the reasons driving this work, and not celebrate outcomes—such as “diversity of thought”—without staying accountable to the goals. Representation, equity and belonging need to remain the North Star. With a focus on these areas, the result will be a wide range of perspectives that feel empowered to contribute.



**Rebekah Bastian**

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I am a product leader, entrepreneur, writer and artist. I am currently SVP of product at Glowforge, helping people make amazing creations with 3D laser printers. Prior to that I founded social timeline platform, [OwnTrail](#), which was acquired by Teal, and spent 15 years at Zillow, with roles including VP of Product and VP of Community & Culture. My award-winning book, [Blaze Your Own Trail](#), came out in 2020 with Berrett-Koehler Publishers. I serve on the board of [Bellwether Housing](#), founded the [AuthenTech](#) and [The Time is DAO](#) communities, and am an [investor and advisor](#) to technology startups and venture funds. I have been recognized in the Puget Sound Business

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