



## MINDFULNESS,

# DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

At a recent conference, I had the opportunity to experience a session entitled Messaging for a New Era hosted by Jennifer Edwards, a self-styled dancer-storyteller-strategist-facilitator. I encourage you to check out her work at: [www.jened.com](http://www.jened.com).

The concept behind the session was that macro changes are facing us all, so we need to rethink the way we make connections and communicate. The trends that will affect marketers in the arts and events world are varied, starting with the fact the tax deductibility of charitable donations will no longer resonate with anyone except the highest donors on our lists (a trend we've already seen at many shops).

More importantly to us in the event business is the trend towards the gig economy for those workers in high paying tech, design and creative jobs. These highly desirable individuals will make decision-making on behalf of our organizations more unpredictable than ever before as the 40-hour per week 9-5 office hours we have dealt with for so long, will no longer be the same. Decisions will be made at the last minute and audiences showing up at unexpected times. Are you ready for these changes coming your way?

We should all prepare for the evolution.

However, the most enlightening part of the conversation was an exercise I encourage you to try on your own. (Note: I'm not usually one for enjoying this type of engagement session, but this was one of the best I've experienced).

We started by answering all three basic questions:

- What makes you feel safe?
- What makes you feel heard?
- What makes you feel valued?

We continued on by answering the following questions:

- How does your organization invite others in to help tell your story?
- How can you improve that invitation?
- How can you invite those individuals to help share your story?
- Furthermore, we were challenged to think:
  - Who can you tap to service the biases you have to certain projects?

We've heard so much over time about storytelling, but I am a firm believer that you need to be listening to others and amplifying their voice in telling your story. Some of the most successful and satisfying work I've been doing recently is because we have engaged the audience and others in their feedback.

Being curious about all of the elements on how to create opportunities is step one and learning from others outside of your normal sphere of influence allows your work and its results to blossom.

Empathy and truly listening to those whose voice you haven't been hearing is a dynamic combination to help you be more mindful in building the bridge to meaningful engagement. This type of engagement is at the core of successful marketing and communications.

I also had the pleasure of recently attending a presentation on diversity, equity and inclusion in the nonprofit space. The conversation was extremely engaging and taught many about what it means to walk in someone else's shoes.

Here again the focus is on the word empathy.

There is a focus in all of our communities to become more diverse, but what does that really mean?

For us in the arts and events space, we welcome all individuals regardless of background, but that doesn't necessarily mean we are making decisions or providing the inclusion necessary for true equity.

Art, in all of its facets, is representative of individual artists and by giving exposure and a voice to those artists in your community, you can elevate the different cultures and begin to make connections that really matter. Embracing different genres alone allow you to engage a diverse population of artist and arts organization and from there, the relationships and conversations can grow organically for the benefit of all involved.

We are all engaged in some form of audience development. By celebrating different cultures and different backgrounds we weave a tapestry that invites more people to participate and feel a sense of true inclusion. Important to all of this are the methods by which you reach these potential audience members. The tools they use to communicate are as diverse as their race, gender and heritage. Be sure that you are also aware to those different channels so that everyone can participate equally in your programming.

With all of that said, diversity, equity and inclusion really begin at the top level of your organization.

Look at your board of directors and leadership. How diverse are the points of view you are listening to? How representative is your organization to the community you serve? Is the representation equitable and fair?

Too many boards are stuck in the old ways of doing business and are lacking from the ability to listen to their changing communities to best reflect the residents and guests that take part in your events.

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Worse yet are those few organizations that try to “check the boxes” when it comes to diversity and inclusion and wind up with token representatives from different racial, ethnic or gender backgrounds but without a real voice in the decisions being made.

These are very tough conversations to have, but the success of our events and of our society hinge on the ability for us to all join together and celebrate our communities and reflect our neighborhoods and cities.

Many organizations already have diversity policies that should be celebrated and used as models for the future. There are many of our fellow event promoters affiliated with municipal or state governments where diversity continues to be addressed on a daily basis. They know the importance of listening to those from different backgrounds and different cultures wind up creating better and more impactful events for their audiences.

Mindfulness, diversity, equity and inclusion are some pretty deep topics for a column usually focused on marketing,

but there are times when we all need to take a step back and look at the bigger picture. Marketing is a sum of all of the parts of our organizations and events. From the individual tactics we use on a daily basis to the brand traits, our success is dependent on our ability to showcase the communities in which we operate. Embrace the diversity of your neighborhoods and use it as a launch point for more successful events and the amazing community building opportunities they present.

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