

How to Be a Diversity and Inclusion Ambassador

Everyone's Role in
Helping All Feel
Accepted, Engaged,
and Valued

CELESTE R. WARREN

FOREWORD BY **KENNETH C. FRAZIER**
Executive Chairman, Merck & Co., Inc.

I dedicate this book to my parents, who taught me what it means to be a leader in times of adversity, and my family, who have supported me throughout my journey.



Contents

Foreword	<i>by Kenneth C. Frazier, Executive Chairman, Merck & Co., Inc.</i>	ix
Introduction	Why Diversity and Inclusion Will Continue to Grow in Importance	1
Chapter 1	What Is the Role of a Diversity and Inclusion Ambassador?	13
Chapter 2	What Skills, Capabilities, and Behaviors Are Needed to Be a Diversity and Inclusion Ambassador?	29
Chapter 3	The Role of Individual Contributors	45
Chapter 4	The Role of the Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer	59
Chapter 5	The Role of the C-Suite Leaders	73
Chapter 6	The Role of the Middle and First-Line Managers	87
Chapter 7	The Role of HR Practitioners	101
Conclusion	Where Do I Start?	117
	Discussion Guide	129
	Acknowledgments	135
	Index	137
	About the Author	145



Foreword

When Celeste asked me to write the foreword for her book, I immediately said yes. During my decade-long tenure as CEO of Merck, I was one of the few African American CEOs in the Fortune 500. I understood what it was like to be different. I understood what it meant to see the world through a different lens. That lens came with different perspectives, ideals, beliefs, and challenges. It also came with opportunities; opportunities to contribute to creating a diverse and inclusive environment around me.

The value of diversity is not new to most companies. Fundamentally, most businesses are about meeting the needs of their customers. In no uncertain terms, we see more and more each day that we live in an interconnected and highly mobile world where diversity, shaped by globalization and technological changes, has become the fabric of modern society.

At the same time that we're more diverse, there is also increased polarization. We've seen a resurgence of ideals and perspectives in the workplace that make it more challenging and dynamic than in past decades. We have to ensure that we leverage the diversity within our organizations

so we do not stifle organizational innovation and productivity and leave employees feeling disengaged, powerless, and disenfranchised.

So, what will it take to lead a more diverse workforce in the future? How can we create an enduring and tangible culture where everyone feels welcome and empowered to do their best work? How can we leverage the differences in our workforce to drive growth and innovation?

In Celeste's book, she shines a light on the fact that everyone has a role to play in order to drive not just diversity but also greater equity and inclusion throughout the organization. Both in the public and private sector, it is becoming more important for individuals to understand the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion and the role they can play to drive a more equitable and inclusive environment. Diversity and Inclusion Ambassadors are needed throughout organizations at every level for there to be true progress.

Diversity and inclusion in the workplace cause all employees to feel accepted and valued, which contributes to high retention rates within organizations. They also allow us to harness the talents of all our people at a time of significant volatility and change, when companies need their full engagement and creativity in order to build a more resilient and sustainable future. Whether one is a senior leader, a middle manager, or an employee who does not manage people, all of us are important in developing an equitable and inclusive culture.

This book will provide individuals with specific guidance on how to leverage their abilities to create the culture they want to see—where everyone can feel engaged and empowered.

I think we all agree that a company's fundamental driver for success is its workforce. As leaders, managers, and employees, it is incumbent upon us to help move our companies and our society forward rather than leaving gaps of opportunity and social disharmony for future generations to solve.

Kenneth Frazier

Executive Chairman, Merck & Co., Inc.



Why Diversity and Inclusion Will Continue to Grow in Importance

“It’s just so overwhelming. I don’t know how I can be of any help.”

I had just completed speaking at a conference and was walking off the stage. A small break in the conference followed my talk and I walked into a small group of attendees waiting to ask a few more questions. A young woman broke from the group and asked if she could talk with me briefly. I knew from the look on her face that it was not going to be a brief encounter. The look could only be described as desperation, as if I were her last hope. I listened empathetically as she introduced herself and quietly asked her question. “Thank you for your talk, Ms. Warren. You’ve been able to work with leaders to drive change within your organization but I find myself in a situation where I want to do more, but I don’t have the abilities that you do and I’m not at the level that you are to be able to drive change. What can I do?”

It’s a statement that I have heard frequently throughout my career as a diversity and inclusion leader. It’s not uncommon for individuals to feel powerless in the face of trying to make a difference. They might feel encumbered by an out-of-touch manager, uninspired by the company’s

leaders, or worse yet, the environment in which they work is one that does not empower its employees. Together these factors cause a barrier that can be challenging for employees working toward diversity and inclusion, but it is something that certainly can be overcome.

As difficult as it may sometimes appear, in any organization everyone must play a role in creating a diverse and inclusive work environment. It doesn't make a difference whether you work in a small company, a large company, a for-profit, a nonprofit, a government agency, a private company, or a public company. All employees must feel that they have a role to play in creating the culture they would like to see where they work, or the needed change will not happen.

Regardless of what you do within your place of work, you have a role in creating change. You may be an employee who does not manage people, you may be a first-line manager, you may be a senior leader, a human resources practitioner, or a person whose role is to lead diversity and inclusion within the company. Everyone has to play a role in driving diversity and inclusion across the workplace.

A very wise mentor once told me years ago that the only thing that is constant is change. The ability to either drive or impact change is an advantage. In addition, having resilience to weather change is also critical. The changes we have already seen in the importance of diversity and inclusion to organizations, governments, communities, neighborhoods, schools, and society in general are only going to amplify in the future.

I think it is important for people to know that the increase in diversity, equity, and inclusion is not something that is going away. It's not a "crisis" that you can weather by simply keeping your head down and waiting for it to go away. It is a part of who we are as individuals and its growing importance is highlighted in a few ways.

First, there are several global trends in diversity and inclusion that will impact all organizations in the future. The workforce of the future is going to increase in diversity globally, across all dimensions of diversity. Each generation is more diverse, more interconnected, and more blended cul-

turally than any generation before it. The global migration of people from country to country also contributes to a more globally diverse workforce.

Second, economic inclusion will continue to grow in importance. Economic inclusion means that all consumers have access to safe, affordable financial products and services. Companies will need to understand the role they play in ensuring that their products and services and external partnerships contribute to closing the gap of financial inequality that exists across the globe due to political, economic, and social conditions.

Third, corporate social activism will increase as a competitive advantage for companies. Years ago, topics such as religion and politics were not openly spoken of in the workplace. Also, corporations focused almost wholly on the bottom line, with social responsibility relegated to their philanthropic efforts. In this day and age, those unspoken rules aren't tenable in the workplace. In fact, with the awakening we see in the workforce and in the world, they aren't even possible. Employees and candidates want to know they are working for a company that has the same values and standards they have as individuals. And social responsibility has moved beyond the Corporate Responsibility department within companies. It has moved into the ledger sheets and annual reports as a bottom-line consideration, given the impact of a company's reputation and brand on shareholder value.

These trends are shaping the future of diversity and inclusion within companies and have amplified the importance of diversity and inclusion. They have an impact on employees throughout the organization, even if those who believe they can just shut their eyes and wish for the discomfort of discussions of diversity and inclusion to just "go away."

I was speaking at a conference recently and during the audience question and answer portion, a young woman shared that when she comes to work, some of her co-workers shy away from discussions about diversity and inclusion. She said they don't feel that these issues should be talked about in the workplace and they talk with the management teams to shut the conversation down. Unfortunately, this is not uncommon in

organizations. The issue of diversity, equity, and inclusion is not going away. Companies are simply microcosms of the entire nation and the whole globe. The demographics of the world are quickly evolving, and the issues employees face in their respective communities do not simply vanish when they step through the doorways of the places they work.

Leadership capabilities that may have made one successful in the past may not be enough to ensure success in the future. During this time of employee “awakening,” leadership skills have evolved beyond just understanding your organization’s financial performance, and now include understanding the people who are driving that performance and understanding them in a much deeper way than in the past.

The workforce and workplace of the future are going to be different than we have seen in the past. As stated earlier, the workforce will be much more in tune with their needs, both personally and professionally, and will be more vocal in seeking empowerment, engagement, and equity as well as their career aspirations. The workplace will also be more dynamic and fluid. For example, in organizations that have white-collar workers and professionals we have learned from the pandemic that “bricks and mortar” may not be as important as a strong IT infrastructure in making a workforce and a company productive and successful and cutting edge.

For these reasons, diversity and inclusion and the role that each of us plays are vitally important. Over my years working for global corporations, I have noticed that many individuals feel they don’t have a role to play in driving diversity and inclusion across the company. But everyone has a role to play because we all want to see a more inclusive culture throughout our companies. We can contribute to that, no matter where we may sit in the organization. All of us are important and are critical to any strategy for driving a diverse and inclusive culture.

Many may be asking the question, well what about equity? So far, I’ve talked about diversity and inclusion, but I haven’t really addressed the

role that equity plays. And equity plays a very important role in driving diversity and inclusion across a company or organization.

Webster's dictionary defines *equity* as fairness or justice in the way people are treated. They use this sentence to provide an example: "In making these decisions we should be governed by the principle of equity." Equity has also been defined as freedom from bias or favoritism. Every individual person can seek to treat their colleagues, friends, family, and co-workers equitably by knowing who they are, what their needs are, and providing them with the support they need to feel a sense of belonging as a result of how you treat them.

Equity is all of those things on an individual level, but I view it as a body of policies, practices, and rules developed to override an imbalance in a larger system, such as a society, organization, or culture. This is a larger issue and requires multiple strategies to address. In order to fully address equity, you have to impact policies, laws, regulations, and systemic issues that have plagued organizations and society for decades and in some cases centuries. In addition, programs and strategies that enable equitable workplaces have to be put in place so all individuals, regardless of how they identify, can experience true "equality."

Equality means each individual or group of people is given the same resources or opportunities. Equity recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome. Not everyone is in a place to allocate resources and opportunities that will drive change throughout any company, regardless of the size or type of organization.

For the purposes of this book, we are speaking specifically about actions everyone can take to create an environment where everyone feels accepted, engaged, and valued. So I would like to focus our attention on the role that everyone can play to create and nurture a diverse and inclusive workplace.

A Framework for Becoming a Diversity and Inclusion Ambassador

There is a simple framework that can be applied to any individual who wishes to be a diversity and inclusion ambassador within their organization. The model is a rather pragmatic one that can be applied across different types of employees.

1. Look at yourself.
2. Take an inventory of your surroundings.
3. Take action.

The first step in the model, “Look at yourself,” means self-reflection. Perform an internal assessment to determine your strengths and what areas you need to develop. Understanding yourself is very important, especially if you want to engage with others.

The second step in the model, “Take an inventory of your surroundings,” is necessary so you can know what to do to help others. Ask yourself what is getting in the way of an inclusive environment in your workplace.

The third step, “Take action,” is critical. It’s not enough that you assess yourself and the environment around you, you have to take action. The revelations from your initial assessments must lead to actions.

Your Personal Assessment

First, you will need to focus on you. I know that may seem counter-intuitive when you think about inclusion, but for you to be an ambassador, you must do a bit of self-reflection. What are some of the skills you have regarding diversity and inclusion? What are you missing? Are you capable of having difficult conversations? Do you have an aptitude for learning? Are you able to influence others?

What are some of your unconscious biases and blind spots? Understanding your own deficiencies will help you to build and increase your

skillsets. I recall years ago, when I was starting out in my professional career, I attended a diversity workshop. During the session, the trainer showed several photos of different people from all different walks of life. There was an individual who looked like an outlaw biker with tattoos, sitting in a bar. The trainer asked us our initial impressions of the person. My first emotion was fear. I imagined myself alone somewhere and running into this person and being afraid. It just so happened that the person in the photo was the mayor of a small town in central Pennsylvania. I was amazed by my own bias and learned a valuable lesson as a result of the experience.

Assess Your Environment

Once you work on yourself, you should take an inventory of your surroundings so you can help others. Ask yourself what is getting in the way of an inclusive environment. Don't consider what level you are in the organization, instead consider your span of influence. Everyone has colleagues and co-workers they interact with daily. Starting your inventory with those nearest you is important. If each person reaches just two or three people, together we can make strides in driving change on a tremendous scale.

Take Action to Drive Diversity and Inclusion Throughout Your Organization

It is very important that you take action. Assessments and analyses without actions will not create change. Your actions can be as simple as learning about a different culture and then seeking someone out from that culture and developing a relationship, which will strengthen your ability to be more inclusive. They could be as complex as developing new policies to enable a more inclusive culture, if you are a human resources professional

or a diversity and inclusion officer. Whatever your role, it is critical that you act.

Everyone Can Be a Diversity and Inclusion Ambassador

Throughout this book, we will talk about what it means to be a diversity and inclusion ambassador and look at it through the eyes of different types of individuals within the organization.

A diversity and inclusion ambassador is a person who acts as a representative or promoter of diversity and inclusion within the organization. They promote diversity and inclusion, influencing others to see its importance and value. They work to ensure that they are actively creating a culture of inclusion and belonging within their organization. We will address this through the lens of different personnel throughout this book.

First, we will look at it through the eyes of the individual contributor, the employee who does not have people management responsibilities. All of us have opportunities to contribute, to speak up and help to drive an inclusive culture within companies. Using your individual power to do this is important. This book will provide practical examples of the role individual contributors can play in driving diversity and inclusion through the organization. Employees who are not people managers are extremely instrumental to organizations' creating a diverse and inclusive culture. Employees should take every opportunity to build their diversity and inclusive capabilities through learning and development opportunities, both within the company and externally.

We will look at it through the eyes of a Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer. When you are first taking over the CDO role, you should have a deep understanding of the organization. What are its strengths and areas of opportunity regarding diversity and inclusion? You should also have a strong vision of where you would like to take the organization. Once you have the organization's current state and a vision of the future in mind,

you must ensure that you have the resources to take the organization from where it is to where you want it to be.

We will explore the role of the C-Suite leaders, who lead large parts of the organization, in driving diversity and inclusion. Senior leaders have the responsibility for organizational change, including in diversity and inclusion. They must ensure that they are setting the stage for a diverse and inclusive environment. As senior leaders, their role is to drive intentionality through their management teams. Each of their managers needs to understand the leader's expectations of diversity and inclusion. Clear expectations help to ensure accountability in management teams. Senior leaders must be diligent with their actions to drive outcomes and model the behaviors and actions they want to see in their managers and employees.

We will look at the role of the first-line manager in ensuring they are providing a diverse and inclusive environment for their teams and being a role model for their peers. If you are a first-line manager, you play a critical role in driving the change your employees want to see in the culture. You can help keep your peers accountable for diversity and inclusion: Lead by example and share best practices, as well as challenges and opportunities, to show how you build diverse teams. Managers need to learn from each other.

First-line managers are also responsible for ensuring their teams are diverse. Having a diverse team includes different perspectives from diverse cultures and experiences. First-line managers also need to create an environment of psychological safety around their employees to nurture those different perspectives. Facilitating inclusive conversations, encouraging fresh ideas, and enabling innovation are benefits of an inclusive work environment. First-line managers must focus their efforts on the acquisition, development, advancement, and retention of their teams.

We will also explore the role that human resources practitioners play in driving diversity and inclusion. This role is crucial because it involves integrating diversity and inclusion through our people practices, policies, and systems to ensure that all employees have an equitable opportunity

to reach their full potential. This is important from an engagement standpoint, from a productivity standpoint, and ultimately from an organization standpoint. By maximizing the performance of the employees, you maximize the performance of the organization. Approaching the talent acquisition, management, and development processes through a lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion is a critical component of the role of HR leaders and professionals.

A question that I hear frequently about being a diversity and inclusion ambassador is “When can I do this? I have a day job, when do I have time to do this work?” Throughout this book, I will provide examples of what each of us can do as we go about our days to help nurture and grow a diverse and inclusive work environment.

It’s important that we all understand that diversity and inclusion cannot be something outside the business. It cannot be viewed as over and above what is required at work. It has to be an integral part of the work that we do on a daily basis. Organizations, whether private or public, big or small, are composed of individual people who are responsible for writing the strategies, making the products, engaging with customers, and completing all of the work that needs to be done. These individual people need to feel valued, appreciated, and respected in the workplace. Having a culture of inclusion where everyone can be themselves while contributing to the success of the organization is essential.

So diversity and inclusion is a very important component of your “day job.” Your desire to be a diversity and inclusion ambassador will make you a very valuable asset to your organization, your peers, and your co-workers.

The workforce of the future is going to increase in diversity globally, across all dimensions of diversity, those you can see and those you can’t see. Each of us will have to be more culturally competent and have a desire to learn about individuals who are different than we are. Social activism will increase as a competitive advantage for companies. It will be important to understand how different decisions made by the companies where we work are impacting different diverse communities around the world.

These trends have amplified the importance that each of us become a diversity and inclusion ambassador.

Everyone in the organization has a role to play to enable a diverse and inclusive work environment. No matter where you sit, what your level is, or where you are on your career journey, you have to take responsibility for your role in driving change across the organization. Everyone must feel they have the ability and the opportunity to drive change or we will never arrive at a work environment where we all truly feel valued.

About the Author



Celeste Warren's life has been shaped by diversity and inclusion. Growing up in a small steel-mill town in western Pennsylvania, she saw firsthand the impact that inequity and exclusion could have on people. Her father was one of the first Black teachers and principals in western Pennsylvania during the late 1950s and 1960s, when battles for civil rights were raging throughout the nation.

She once asked her father how he dealt with being a trailblazer in the education system, especially during that era. He told her a story about when he first was hired as a teacher at the high school. He was an education major and they made him the physical education teacher. There was no gymnasium for P.E., so the class was held outside in the parking lot of the school.

When he first started teaching the class in the parking lot, the parents of the students would come and sit in their cars and watch him while he was teaching their children. He didn't let them sway him or distract him and continued to teach the students. He taught them discipline, integrity, and respect for themselves and each other. He said that each week, the cars

would diminish in the parking lot until there were none left. Over time, he had overcome the prejudices of that era by staying true to himself, his approach, and his students.

Of all the stories and anecdotes her father shared with her about his life, that is the one that she cherishes most because it highlights some of the strongest traits of leadership: inner strength and patience, self-confidence, and faith.

Celeste has taken those attributes with her throughout her career. As the leader for Merck's Global Diversity and Inclusion Center of Excellence, she is responsible for working with global leaders to advance and embed diversity and inclusion throughout the organization. She has had to demonstrate those traits to be able to push the diversity and inclusion agenda forward in the organization in the face of adversity and competing priorities.

Her passion for working with leaders to enhance the employee experience within the organization has enabled her to drive a culture of inclusion and belonging. Celeste has more than thirty years of experience in the areas of change management, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Always leaving her colleagues with a "call to action" to stay relevant, stay supportive, and stay in the fight, Celeste strives to make an impact on her organization and on the world around her.

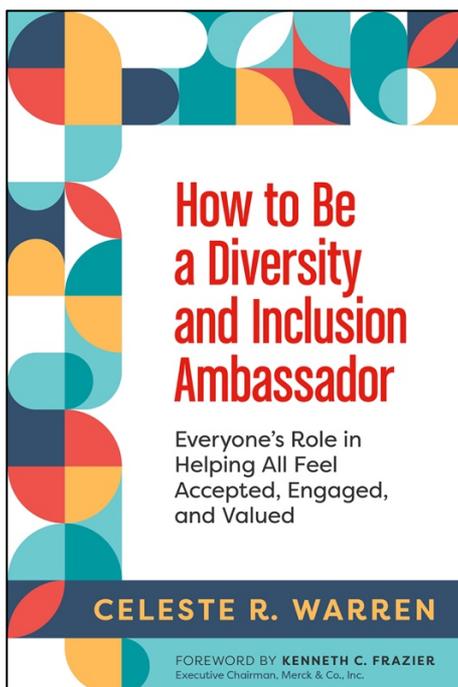
She has been recognized by many organizations, including *Black Enterprise's* "Top Executives in Global Diversity and Inclusion," *Savoy Magazine's* "Most Influential Women in Corporate America," and *Diversity Global Magazine's* "Influential Women in Global Diversity."

Celeste's articles on diversity, equity, and inclusion have been featured in numerous national and global publications such as *Savoy Magazine*, *Diversity Women Magazine*, *Manage HR Magazine*, and *Black Enterprise*. She has also had the opportunity to speak at various events across the world such as National Urban Annual Conference, London's Festival of Marketing, and CNBC Inclusion in Action Forum.

Celeste attended the University of Kentucky where she earned her B.S. degree. She received her master's degree from Carnegie Mellon University.

She is the wife of John Warren and the mother of two children, Christina-Celeste and John Steven, Jr.

**We hope that you enjoyed this excerpt
from *How to Be a Diversity and Inclusion
Ambassador* by Celeste R. Warren**



On sale August 30, 2022. Order now!

[Amazon](#)
[Barnes & Noble](#)
[Bookshop](#)
[IndieBound](#)
[Berrett-Koehler](#)