

Leading inclusively

Your guide to 7 essential leadership qualities





Leading inclusively is essential to the health of your organization

When leaders make positive changes, work culture naturally follows.

Inclusive leaders treat all team members equitably, and strive to make sure everyone feels a sense of belonging. They see the value in – and tap into – each team member’s unique experience, knowledge, and point of view. Leading inclusively can help you build relationships and trust with your employees, and, in turn, increase their engagement and productivity. It’s a competitive advantage that can help you attract and retain top talent – and make your organization a better place to work for every employee, every day.

7 key attributes of an inclusive leader



Self-aware



Fair



Courageous



Adaptable



Curious



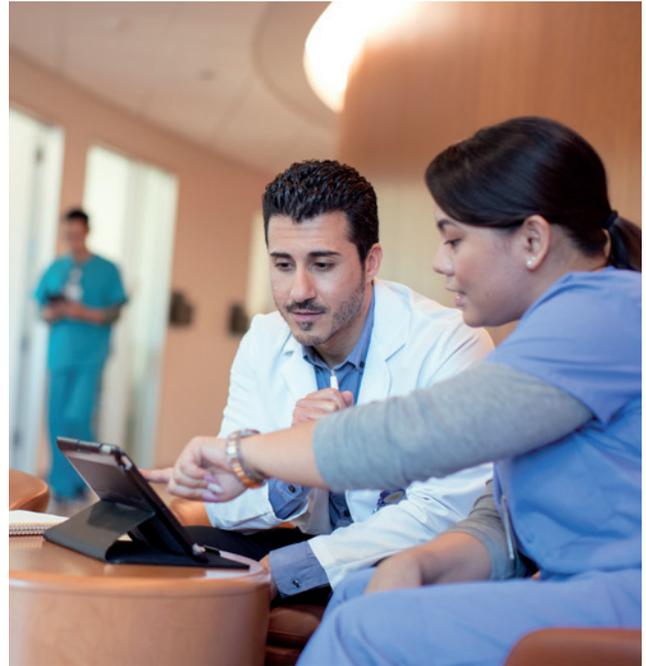
Collaborative



Humble

Expanding the scope of our own equity, inclusion, and diversity efforts

When we first identified these 7 key attributes, the goal was to support leaders within Kaiser Permanente. But we quickly realized this framework could help leaders at any organization recognize – and maximize – the value of an inclusive and diverse workforce. We're excited to share it with you and help support your diversity and inclusion efforts.



A leader in workplace equality

Several organizations have recognized Kaiser Permanente as a leader for our commitment to equity, inclusion, and diversity (EID) and comprehensive EID strategy and programs.

- Recognized by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation for our leadership in equity, inclusion, and diversity and honored as a **Best Place to Work for LGBTQ Equality**.¹
- Named to the **DiversityInc Top 50 "Hall of Fame Companies"** for demonstrating exceptional workplace diversity and inclusion management.²
- Recognized by the National Organization on Disability as a **"Leading Disability Employer."**³

The 7 key attributes of highly inclusive leaders



Using this guide

On the journey to become a more inclusive organization, it's critical for leaders and managers to not just understand the value of diversity and inclusion, but to know what leading inclusively looks like in practice. This quick reference guide provides information and suggestions for how to apply the 7 key attributes in your role as a leader.



Self-aware



Inclusive leaders make an effort to learn about their own biases and reflect on the impact their words and actions have on others.

Self-aware leaders have an honest understanding of their own values, motivations, thought patterns, and unconscious biases. They recognize how their behaviors affect other people, and intentionally take time to think before they act. They're highly invested in making equitable decisions and serving as advocates and allies to their diverse team members. And they welcome tough feedback about their own leadership style because they see it as an opportunity to learn and grow.

Self-aware leadership in action

- Create time and space for self-reflection on a consistent basis.
- Seek out diverse feedback about your leadership behaviors and receive it openly.
- Build awareness of the different types of unconscious bias and how to help mitigate them in the workplace.
- Take meaningful actions that can help combat bias – like engaging diverse panels of interviewers when hiring new employees.



Did you know?

84% of employees have experienced workplace microaggressions, which are everyday slights rooted in bias.⁴



Fair



Highly inclusive leaders strive to treat all team members equitably – and make objective decisions that benefit everyone.

Fair leaders know that “fair” doesn’t necessarily mean “the same.” They treat each team member equitably based on their unique needs, preferences, and contributions – because different people require different levels of support. They demonstrate fairness by making sure everyone on the team feels heard, recognized, and valued – and by sharing transparent information about what’s driving important organizational decisions.

Fair leaders are respected and trusted. And when employees are treated fairly, they respond with kindness, motivation, engagement, and loyalty.

Fair leadership in action

- Create equitable policies, processes, and programs within your team.
- Ensure that your actions don’t favor certain employees over others.
- Check in with team members regularly to make sure they feel heard.
- Encourage all employees to participate in important team decisions.



Did you know?

Only **36%** of employees feel their organization fosters an inclusive work culture.⁵



Courageous



Highly inclusive leaders are brave enough to speak up, challenge the status quo, and serve as agents for change.

Courageous leaders speak up against disrespectful behavior and bias, and openly question the status quo in pursuit of improving, realizing, and maximizing equity and inclusion within their organization. They aren't afraid to stand up for their team members – even if it means taking a personal risk. They're also brave enough to acknowledge their own mistakes and limitations. Courageous leaders truly value – and learn from – the diverse perspectives and points of view of everyone on their team.

Courageous leadership in action

- Advocate for change and actively pursue new ways to become a more equitable and inclusive organization.
- Challenge exclusionary behavior and address it quickly and directly.
- Speak up and put personal interests aside in favor of doing what's right.
- Engage diverse team members in thoughtful discussions about sensitive topics.



Did you know?

45% of employee perceptions about inclusion are based on their manager's behavior.⁶



Adaptable



Highly inclusive leaders adjust their leadership style based on their team members' cultural and work style differences.

Adaptable leaders recognize the value of diverse perspectives – and make meaningful efforts to engage with employees whose backgrounds, cultures, lifestyles, and approaches to work differ from their own. They also understand that there are different ways of working, and how to leverage each team member's individual strengths. Adaptable leaders know how to make employees feel more comfortable, included, and supported – and help them bring their best to work every day.

Adaptable leadership in action

- Make an effort to fully engage with team members and co-workers whose strengths and backgrounds are different than yours.
- Ask team members about their preferred work and communication styles and take steps to meet their individual needs.
- Seek out feedback and continuously learn new and better ways to support diverse work styles.
- Trust employees to work the way they need to, as long as the work is getting done and being executed well.



Did you know?

Team members with inclusive leaders say they are:

17% higher performing

29% more collaborative⁷



Curious



Highly inclusive leaders have an open mindset and a sincere desire to understand how their employees view and experience the world.

Curious leaders are eager to understand and learn from their team members. They intentionally seek out perspectives that are different from their own, and can hold conflicting ideas in their minds without judgment. They use feedback and insights from diverse employees to help them overcome their own biases and blind spots and make more equitable, inclusive leadership decisions that benefit everyone. Curious leaders build meaningful connections with their team members, and make sure everyone feels safe, supported, and included.

Curious leadership in action

- Seek out multiple, independent viewpoints and ideas.
- Demonstrate a sincere interest in getting to know every person you lead.
- Stop yourself from making quick judgments.
- Ask thoughtful questions and practice active listening.



Did you know?

Inclusion accounts for **35% of an employee's engagement** in their work.⁸



Collaborative



Highly inclusive leaders empower diverse groups of people to lead projects and make decisions together.

Collaborative leaders empower their team members to work together and build on each other's ideas. They foster a culture of acceptance and belonging, creating an environment where everyone feels heard, valued, and safe to express their thoughts freely. Rather than controlling the flow of ideas, collaborative leaders actively seek out diverse perspectives – and invite everyone to participate in making decisions and achieving important objectives. They create a sense of shared responsibility and purpose that helps everyone work together, better.

Collaborative leadership in action

- Develop shared goals where everyone feels a sense of ownership.
- Emphasize that everyone's ideas are equally valid and valuable.
- Break down traditional divides between roles, departments, and skill sets by creating opportunities for different groups to work together.
- Encourage – and model – open communication and collaboration.



Did you know?

Inclusive decision-making leads to **better business decisions 87%** of the time.⁹



Humble



Highly inclusive leaders have a modest view of their own importance – and a keen understanding of their personal strengths and weaknesses.

Humble leaders focus on the team – and the big picture – rather than themselves. They encourage and engage in curious dialogue to hear and learn from diverse points of view. They're also confident enough to own up to their mistakes, hold themselves accountable, and value feedback and collaboration. By readily embracing uncertainty – and admitting that they don't have all the answers – humble leaders create space for others to step forward and lead.

Humble leadership in action

- Ask for help when you need it.
- Allow others the opportunity to lead – and give credit where credit is due.
- Share your mistakes as teachable moments.
- Behave authentically and consistently in every interaction, with every employee.



Did you know?

Employees feel **3x more empowered** to do their best work when they believe their organization fosters an inclusive work culture.¹⁰



Inclusive leaders help employees and organizations thrive

We know a lot about why inclusion is good for employees and workplaces. We also know that leaders play a critical role and must stay involved and committed to help foster and further inclusiveness. This is not an exhaustive list of inclusive leadership behaviors, but a collection of ideas designed to empower you to cultivate a more inclusive leadership approach, tap into the value of your diverse workforce, and help your organization become more inclusive overall.

1. Best Places to Work 2021, Corporate Equality Index 2021, Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2021. 2. DiversityInc Hall of Fame Companies 2018-2021, DiversityInc, 2021. 3. Leading Disability Employer 2017-2020, National Organization on Disability, 2020. 4. "Understanding Organizational Barriers to a More Inclusive Workplace, McKinsey, June 23, 2020. 5. "The Impact of Equality and Values Driven Business," Salesforce, 2017. 6. "Report: Getting Real About Inclusive Leadership," Catalyst, November 21, 2019. 7. Juliet Bourke and Andrea Titus, "Why Inclusive Leaders are Good for Organizations, and How to Become One," *Harvard Business Review*, March 29, 2019. 8. See note 6. 9. "Hacking Diversity with Inclusive Decision Making, Cloverpop, 2017. 10. See note 5.

