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How to Foster Diversity in Your Company

A creative agency executive shares her tips for building an inclusive and diverse team.

By John Corrigan



The Expert

Lili Hall



Q: What advice do you have for employers looking to build a diverse team?

A: If you have representation and different lenses at the table, you're going to produce a better product. I'm not interested in hiring people necessarily like me. Why would you want more people like you? I want different genders, races, sexual orientations, etc. It's easier if you're naturally curious about people from different backgrounds. Don't just focus on their ethnicity or race – learn about their interests outside the office.

Q: How do you find out about those interests?

A: Allow people to be themselves at work. At our company, we have a culture of sharing. We have a staff meeting every Monday in which we share what people are up to. The more you share, the more people feel comfortable opening up.

Q: What avenues do you take for building a diverse team?

A: You have to attend different types of events where you might find diversity. Don't just pull from one university or city – expand your potential talent pool. Go to industry events and participate in breakout sessions and networking opportunities. I've gone to cultural arts festivals and talked with the artists to get a feel for who they are and what they can bring to the table.

Q: How has diversity shaped the content you've produced?

A: We worked with a healthcare company that wanted to target Hispanic men in their 50s for colon cancer screenings. I'm Hispanic, so I can bring my lens to that project, but I'm not male, so I could only take the project to a certain level before it was time to reach out to the actual audience. You have to understand who your audience is and make sure your company represents that.

Q: How can you avoid the perception of tokenism?

A: If you're hiring people because you want to check a box off, that's a big problem. You need to be authentic. If you truly believe that person is going to contribute and make your company better, hire them. You also want to make people feel comfortable raising their hand if something doesn't feel right. Give your staff permission to be able to say, "That doesn't resonate with me. I don't think it's going to resonate with the community I represent." Make sure your employees feel they have a voice.

*Lili Hall is the president and CEO of Minneapolis-based **KNOCK Inc.**, an independent creative agency leading strategic brand development and design thinking on a national and international scale. In 2019, Hall was named to the Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal's list of Most Admired CEOs.*

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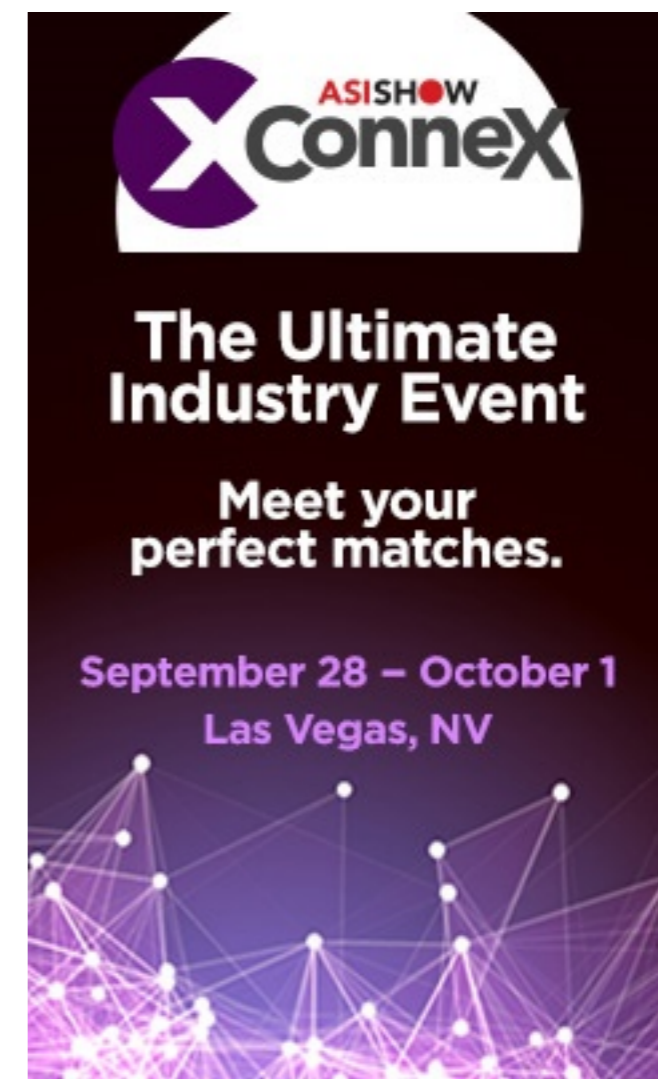
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