Dear CEO:

Culture Transformation is the Solution, not Training

As a 30 year HR and workforce management expert, a former Global Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer for several major organizations, and a certified leadership coach, I speak from experience when I say that training is *not* the cure to responding to poor decisions made by management, or to public outrage when revelations of bad behavior go viral and threatens your company brand.

In my consulting firm we often receive calls to conduct a number of training programs ranging from leadership development, diversity, inclusion, unconscious bias, anti-harassment, team effectiveness, trust-building, and other similar topics. The majority of the time, these requests are in direct response to some unfortunate incident such as a lawsuit (or threat of one), increased employee complaints, high disengagement, turnover, or in response to a company's crisis featured in the national news that has generated protest and public outcry.

Companies Rush to Training

We recently saw a rush to training when Starbucks was forced to address racial bias issues that occurred in one of its stores by a front line supervisor. It closed 8,000 stores to hold mandatory training for its entire workforce. Other companies followed suit and started calling us to conduct Implicit Bias training. We also saw Uber faced with crisis after crisis over the last year. To address the company's large-scale and fundamental culture problems, Uber piloted a corporate education program like that of a university model. In the first few months of its launch, more than 6,000 out of Uber's 15,000 employees signed up to take the classes in leadership and strategy.

And then another crisis happened last year, got national coverage and has forced companies around the world to conduct training and to address aspects of its culture. That was the #MeToo, #TimesUp, and now #WhyIDidntReport movements. Over the past year, our firm has been inundated with requests for anti-harassment training as a result of revelations and accusations leveled against media moguls, entertainers and celebrities, government officials, CEOs of major corporations, and now a Supreme Court nominee.

I do applaud companies that are at least willing to take such bold moves as closing all of its stores to educate staff through mandatory training. I also give credit to companies who are at least willing to do something to address the issue such as terminating the employment of the

violators, airing new commercials as a PR campaign to reinvent its brand, and hosting listening tours. However, I do wonder what happened after the training was concluded, employees went back to work, and the public applauded the company's show of commitment to training and education. My response to clients in these types of situations is that a few hours of training, a 60 second commercial, or a one hour focus group won't result in behavior, attitude, or mindset shifts. The reality is that **training is not the fix. Culture transformation is the solution.**

Training should not be the first step, nor should it be the only step. If the necessary *systems* are not in place to drive sustainable change, this huge investment of training time, money, and resources will be deemed a futile exercise. It's what happens beyond these activities and in the culture of the company on a daily basis that will make the difference.

What is Workplace Culture?

The topic of corporate culture has been active in some organizations for decades, but it is now a global issue as more institutions are addressing organizational health. Culture consists of the norms, values, behaviors and attitudes that the company rewards or holds in high esteem. In an article published last year in *Harvard Business Review* entitled, "Changing Company Culture Requires a Movement, Not a Mandate" culture was described as being like the wind. "It is invisible, yet its effect can be seen and felt. When it is blowing in your direction, it makes for smooth sailing. When it is blowing against you, everything is more difficult." Company culture can make or break your brand and reputation among customers and top talent; it can impact employee productivity, engagement, creativity, and retention; and it can affect bottom line profits and company success.

Employees are demanding at the very least, that our workplaces be more inclusive, welcoming, respectful, create a sense of belonging, and be free from harassment. For some companies with legacy cultures and those who have existed over a century, this is an extremely hard change management process. But it's necessary in this era of demographic shifts where the global workforce and marketplace is much more diverse, multicultural, multigenerational, and working more virtually and flexibly. So how does this happen? How do you really move the needle beyond training activities?

Where I have seen the greatest success in working with my clients to move the needle is when they are willing to implement a more comprehensive and robust strategy rather than a quick fix. So here are my proven steps to successfully transforming culture.

12 Strategies for Achieving a Sustainable Culture Transformation™
Assess your culture.
Revise your policies, procedures, and strategic plan.
Establish core values.
Communicate continuously.
Change the people who don't want to change.
Replace archaic belief systems.
Integrate inclusive behaviors into all organizational processes and practices.
Offer learning and development resources.
Lead by example.
Practice sound decision making and problem solving.
Institute accountability systems that reward inclusive behaviors and that reinforce your company values.
Sustain the culture by operationalizing all of the above strategies through continuous innovation and transformation.

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The steps presented above are not ranked in any particular order, but when we are working with our clients, we always recommend that they start at the Assess phase. This is the most critical step in the process because it uncovers and reveals the current state of the company and establishes how much ground work needs to be done. In this first step we conduct a S.W.O.T. analysis, Stakeholder interviews with internal and external personnel, culture audit, leadership assessments both individually as well as with the senior management team as a group, administer employee surveys, and conduct focus groups with staff. Determining which order to implement

all of the other steps will depend on the company's resources, appetite for change, the pace that they can or are willing to take, and the amount of work ahead. Of course the last step in the process **should** be the Sustain phase because it is important to ensure that all of the work that has been implemented has some stickiness. Ongoing process improvement, evaluation, course-correction, and innovation should become a way of life in order to sustain the work.

I know it sounds like a lot to do but culture transformation takes time, effort, energy and commitment. The process is not a sprint, it's a marathon and must be approached with a real sense of urgency in order to create the future state.

Culture is Everyone's Responsibility

Culture is everyone's responsibility, but I have seen the greatest success in culture transformation when leaders at the highest level in the organization take the lead and walk the talk. Every leader and employee in the organization should be held accountable for living the values of the organization.

Don't be the company that has regrets for not making necessary culture changes because it would take too long and cost too much. I imagine that Starbucks, Uber, Nike, United Airlines, Wells Fargo, the NFL, Facebook, the Federal Government, and many others whose workplace cultures have come under scrutiny in recent months, all wish that they were not having to deal with culture transformation in the public's eye and under such adverse circumstances. It's bad for their brands, and bad for their business and unfortunately, I'm sure that there are more to come.

My advice and coaching to all CEOs, Presidents, Chief HR Officers, and Board of Directors is to heed this call for culture transformation and not just use training as a Band-Aid and quick fix in hopes that it will go away with the changing news cycle. Use the steps listed above and make the commitment to see this as a strategic imperative and an act of innovation and reinvention that will result in long term business success.