

How Fighting for Equality Means Demanding Equity



While 2020 unleashed a world of sorrows with both a health and social crisis, 2021 has brought momentum for positive change in its wake. I believe that has led us to a period of awakening. Personally. For Navistar. The United States. Perhaps the world.

It begins with open and honest communication and actively, intentionally working to make sure everyone is part of the conversation. It begins with ensuring diversity, equity, and inclusion in equal measure. And that requires action. I have a role in leading that action.

I have enjoyed a successful, 20+ year career at Navistar. I've proven that as a young woman of color and a young mother that I could hack it in our male-dominated

industry.

I became active as a leader in our Women In Navistar (WIN) group because I knew from experience that it's important to have a network of "others" – people who share similar challenges yet can also help to uplift and support each other.

I discovered, as a double minority (woman and person of color), that I had challenges ahead of me in my career that many of my cisgender white male peers may not have. And I wasn't alone. There were others who had seen people get promoted over and around us – people who didn't necessarily fit into what we call a marginalized group.

Let's just say that not everyone embraces inclusion efforts at the same level. We all need allies and advocates to amplify our voices.

When I took what is now my role as the head of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, I was excited for the opportunity to make a difference. But I also experienced other emotions. Mostly, I was nervous about being labeled as someone pushing my own agenda as a black woman, rather than as a leader who has an affinity for all people and a genuine interest in their perspectives and experiences.

I am very intentional about how I approach things, and I came in committed to advancing representation in the workplace. Holistically. For everybody. Advocacy and equity matter, and I wanted this to be my contribution to Navistar – my legacy – in making sure everyone has a seat at the table.

We currently have seven mission-driven employee resource groups (ERGs) and are working on establishing an eighth to further serve members of our Navistar family. With the switch to all-virtual communication during shelter-in-place, it was important for the groups to actively provide a sense of community, establish a basis for trust, and create a space where people can be vulnerable and open to sharing.

In my experience, as Americans, we have traditionally tried to forget certain aspects of our past when they make certain people uncomfortable. I get it. But it's time to move on, because the longer we wait the harder it becomes. Frankly, I am more interested in having the conversations that drive a plan of action than I am about the discomfort it might cause.

I am convinced that we must correct what hasn't worked in the past so that we can build a future that works for everyone. So, our efforts, even during the pandemic, were focused on action. What can we do to make things

better? How do we deliver what matters? Not only for the majority group, but for all?

This awakening opened new discussions that moved beyond issues of gender, race, or sexual orientation, to diversity of thought. People have different perspectives, and as an organization with the stated purpose of reimagining delivering what matters, we realized the absolute need to proactively understand “what matters” to different groups of people. Especially if they feel marginalized.

As part of our ongoing virtual chat series, and efforts to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion, I realized we weren’t all using the words in the same way. We were missing foundational, shared definitions. We needed a common language – because meaningful change requires shared meaning.

Hopefully, starting with a basic understanding of what we mean by DEI will eliminate some of the confusion that happens when people use the same words in different ways. But this got me wondering ... how many other things might be non-issues if we just talked about them, examined the situation, and worked toward a shared understanding and resolution?

This is what our efforts to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion can do. We need to get past the words and walk the talk. We are building a framework for action.

I am proud that our company continues to make it a priority to develop a DEI platform that brings inclusion and respect for our human differences into every aspect of the enterprise. This kind of commitment – coupled with grassroots action from the ERGs – is what it will take to drive meaningful change.

I like the way Vernā Myers, author of the book “Moving Diversity Forward”, describes it: “Diversity is being invited to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance.” To extend her metaphor, equity is making sure everyone has a way to get to the party – wherever they come from – and that they’ll be invited and assisted to get to the next one, too.

Right now, if there is only one take-away from this discussion, I hope it’s this – diversity, equity, and inclusion benefits everyone. It’s not a finite resource that requires us to take from Peter to pay Paul. It just means we take care of Peter however he needs help. And we do the same for Paul. So that the two can proceed as equals. Once we level the playing field, it is level for everyone.

Navistar is in the process of a remarkable transformation. The entire world is awakening from the fear and isolation caused by the pandemic. As we take that first step into what comes next, let’s put our best foot forward by insisting on diversity, equity, and inclusion. For all.

DIVERSITY

At Navistar, we embrace all expressions of Diversity – race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, physical appearance and diversity of thought (ideas, perspectives, and values).

EQUITY

At Navistar, we help all employees succeed by acknowledging their unique needs; providing fair treatment, access, opportunity and advancement; and eliminating barriers to their full participation in all aspects of the employee experience.

INCLUSION

At Navistar, we create an environment that is both diverse and inclusive, that gives every individual and group space to be themselves at work because they feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued. At Navistar, we succeed when we actively involve everyone’s ideas, knowledge, perspectives, approaches and styles.