# Joseph Santana, LLC

## Diversity & Inclusion Executive Briefing Paper

**Reaching for the Next Level in Diversity and Inclusion**

**By Joe Santana**

Thomas Jefferson once said "If you want something you've never had, you must be willing to do something you've never done."

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### So after decades of investments, where are we?

Since the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in the United States, minorities and women have made a great deal of real progress. Just think—not too long ago, "Help Wanted" ads were divided into "Men Wanted" and "Women Wanted" sections. It was also unusual to see minorities in television or movies; on the rare occasions when they did appear, it was in menial positions. Women, who were shown more frequently, appeared almost exclusively as wives, mothers, or the love interest of the main character—who was always a white, straight male. Back in the real world, there were few if any women and minorities in supervisory positions, or working as firefighters, police officers, doctors, business leaders, and college professors. Today, women in the U.S. have clearly become a more powerful force in business and political life. As for the middle-class African American community, while it has been smaller than the white middle class, it has definitely grown.[1] Additionally, a new Latino "yuppie" population is also growing,[2] and other, newer immigrant populations have also emerged as strong contributors to the U.S. economy.

Many private and public sector organizations have certainly made huge strides in supporting this progress. It's almost impossible today to find a company that does not have diversity officers, diversity councils, employee networks, and a host of other diversity- and inclusion-related practices and positions. Some of the interventions and other tools companies invest in include, but are not limited to:

- Diversity Recruiting Training
- General diversity leadership training
- Discrimination training
- Unconscious bias training
- Conferences
- Symposiums
- Associations
- Best-practice sharing events for ERGs, CDOs, etc
- Internal and external skill training for ERGs

Clearly, this combination of legislation and company effort has indeed taken us a long way.

Nevertheless, we are still far from declaring victory in workplace diversity and inclusion efforts. Despite all the vanity awards handed out to thousands of companies for being best in one or more aspects of their diversity and inclusion efforts, we can still find evidence that none of us is quite "there" yet in a number of places. For example, women and minorities still earn less than white males for similar work;[3] we're only just starting to make serious inroads into better understanding and appreciation of sexual orientation differences and other aspects of diversity in many organizations; and a quick look at recent EEOC

activity shows that violations of basic rights we believe all people possess are still regularly occurring.[4] A broader look around the world doesn't present many examples of much greater success in companies based in other countries either. As noted by a *Huffington Post* blogger in an article appropriately titled "Getting Past 'Stuck' With Diversity and Inclusion," some organizations seem to be perpetually circling the same mountain.[5]

## What's keeping us stuck?

I've found seven persistent obstacles that simply defy current conventional efforts when it comes to making greater progress with diversity. They are:

1. *Exclusion.* In spite of many well-intentioned efforts to create inclusive environments, most organizations still have untouchable pockets of exclusion. Perhaps it's those coveted executive positions that senior executives only offer to people they "know," despite a diverse slate of possible candidates and the extensive training they just completed. Or perhaps it's the executive sales teams comprised of golf buddies who, just a month ago, completed their unconscious-bias training. Whatever shape it takes, almost every organization has protected pockets of institutional exclusion that do not appear to yield to any of the conventional remedies.

2. *Stereotyping.* Every time I hear someone say that he or she is gender-blind or color-blind, I question whether that person really believes that statement to be true or is simply mouthing what for a long time has been considered politically safe-speak. All political correctness aside, the bottom line is that no one is exempt from stereotyping. We do it all the time, just as we have automatic internal systems that help us navigate a crowded street silently without colliding into each other. In fact, we are often very much aware of some of the stereotypes to which we cling, while many others remain hidden from us, waiting to be activated by certain situations. Denying this human condition only enables it to get in our way, unsupervised, and allows us to avoid accountability and responsibility for managing it. Awareness of it may increase our opportunity to manage it, but it does not mean we are "cured."

3. *Discrimination.* While the occurrence of blatant discriminatory behavior has gone down in the last few decades, its subtler cousin, the micro-inequity, is alive and well. The fact is that at the reflexive microscopic level, we do not treat people equally and never have. In our world of laws and punishments, we express ourselves through subtler but nevertheless powerful micro-behaviors. Often these offences, which aren't big enough

to trigger lawsuits, persist even after diversity and unconscious-bias training.

4. *Piecemeal approaches to diversity.* In many companies, diversity and inclusion efforts were formulated long before a business case was made for such initiatives, except for their potential usefulness in helping a company avoiding lawsuits. Cloaked in statements asserting that diversity and inclusion being "the right thing to do," many of these efforts were actually made simply to help organizations avoid litigation as new anti-discrimination laws were passed. A few that are a bit more business-centric were hatched in consumer-focused organizations that sold to a changing market base, and were presented as a way of connecting with these new communities and their pockets of disposable income. Later, the need to pursue a changing pool of job candidates, strong demands from customers, and globalization all drove business-to-business organizations into the diversity arena as well[6]. A holistically integrated approach that solidly connects diversity and inclusion with an overall organizational business case and seamlessly blends with individual departmental goals, however, is a rare if not mythical beast. Even when diversity and inclusion initiatives make an effort to create this type of DNA-bound integration, there are still pockets of a company that can remain resistant.

5. *Silo Thinking.* Another persistent obstacle to sustainable whole-systems diversity and inclusion is the silo-thinking approach of looking for specific solutions to a specific challenge without considering the organizational context and inter-rational impact.[7] This has given rise to a culture of best-practice sharing and copying that assumes that what works over there will work the same way over here. Unfortunately, it often does not, and simply leaves everyone chasing every new shiny best practice that comes down the pike. This often results in a waste not only of time and money, but of credibility as well. Nevertheless, the chase after so-called isolated "best-practices" persists.

6. *Conflict avoidance.* In many organizations, unfortunately, powerful business executives who know little or nothing about diversity and inclusion have more influence over the shape of their companies' diversity and inclusion practices and strategy than the very people who they hire as experts to advise them and support them in their journey. People in change-influencing roles need to have the most highly developed skills in meeting and managing conflict head-on. Despite all the communication training, however, a persistent discomfort in and avoidance of entering what some call the ZOUD, or Zone of Uncomfortable Debate, is another obstacle.

7. *Skill gaps in passionate supporters.* Almost every person I've spoken with over the last ten years has talked about the fact that his or her employee network leaders are passionate, but lack certain business skills, such as strategic planning, presenting, leading, influencing, etc. Unfortunately, now, a decade later, the same things are being said about the same people. The same holds true of diversity council members and other participants in the diversity and inclusion effort. Since an effort is only as powerful as its weakest link, these unaddressed pockets of competency represent another persistent obstacle to reaching the next level.

### What do we need to do to get to the next level?

So what can we do to move past these and other obstacles to the next level of performance and results? The answer, I believe, lies in two areas:

**1. Performance Coaching.** We all know that learning how to do something is very different from putting what we've been taught into action. I often use the example of dancing. I can explain step patterns and beats in a piece of music that need to be followed in order to do a particular dance. That, however, does not immediately translate into knowledge that the learner can put to expert use. Left to their own devices at this point, the newly trained dancers will probably look like they are lumbering through the choreography quite stiffly. To get them to a higher level of proficiency, I need to guide them through the movements with corrections—at first close and frequent, and then increasingly sparse—until they "get it." If we want to get a better-quality performance out of our investments in current diversity and inclusion education efforts, I thus believe that these efforts must go beyond teaching and training. They must include coaching.

2. **New Approaches.** Thomas Jefferson once said, "If you want something you've never had, you must be willing to do something you've never done." Rather than returning to the same room to look in the same places for the missing car keys that we did not find there the last time we looked, perhaps it's time to step into another room? Rather than having a "Best-Practice Sharing" session, I invite you to consider having a "Next-Practice Development" session.

The investment of billions of dollars, countless hours, and immeasurable amounts of passion and effort have resulted in a great deal of progress, considering where we were a few decades ago. To borrow and paraphrase, however, from the title and philosophy of Marshall Goldsmith's 2007 book, what got us to here won't get us to there. To move past the present plateau and continue to reach greater heights of success, we need to break new ground in

our approach. We need more than our colleagues' best practices. We need to break new ground with next practices!

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# About the Author



Joseph (Joe) Santana, President of Joseph Santana LLC, is a well-known diversity and inclusion management strategy consultant, speaker and coach whose signature consulting and coaching program, the *Diversity and Inclusion Heroes* Journey is designed to support the development and implementation of new creative D&I approaches that result in transformational growth for the diversity officer and breakthroughs past obstacles for their organizations.

*The Diversity and Inclusion Hero(ine)'s Journey*
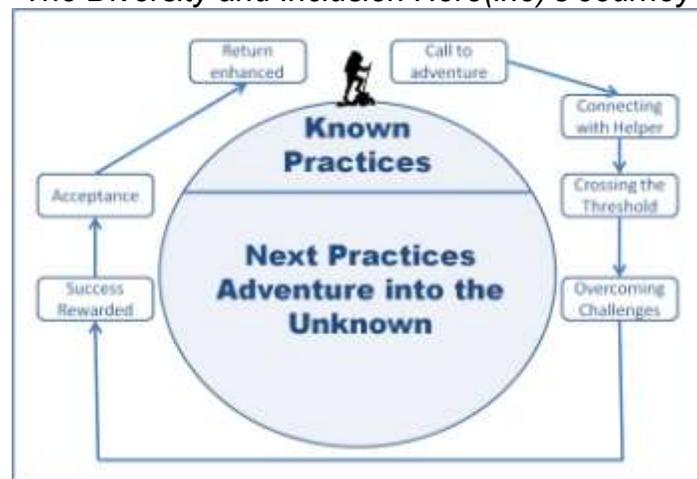


In the *Diversity and Inclusion Heroes Journey*, Joe first joins the client-partner as a facilitator and supporter in finding and developing creative new solutions to challenges that are resistant to current practices and that thereby provide "a call to adventure." Once these new ideas are converted into actionable and measureable behaviors by the client-partner and Joe in the role of Helper, Joe continues to support the client-partner past challenges, internal, and external resistance through the entire exciting journey to success and process acceptance.

For a free 30 minute consultation about this and other programs Joe offers, call or email him.