DFW’s Bright Spots in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

In the fall of 2018, two members of the DFW Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, Rizwana Khader and Kathy Shearer (DE, Newark-1), set out to learn more about the “Bright Spots” or “flashes of success” in DFW’s more diverse chapters. *(Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard, Chip and Dan Heath, 2010)*. Bright spots are “look[ing] for the early glimmers that something is going right. And when you find a bright spot, your mission is to study it and clone it” (*Fast Company* blog, 12 May 2010). Kathy and Riz invited over 30 chapters identified as diverse, and eleven of those chapters were interviewed.

The leaders of these chapters were excited that DFW was reaching out to learn more about diversity and inclusion at the chapter level and were very gracious and provided many details about their chapters and their diversity. They indicated that their meeting conversations became “much richer” as the diversity of their chapters increased. One leader responded, “I feel better after being at a meeting. It fills up my cup.”

It was found that every chapter had different kinds of diversity, indicating that chapters that are diverse respond to their communities. Some chapters were racially, but not economically diverse. Some attracted people of diverse faiths, or were primarily one of the following faiths: Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu. While there are some chapters of diverse ages, most chapters have people who are in the same age group, meaning that they usually range from mothers with school age children to 80+ year old women. Many of the chapters that were interviewed are culturally diverse, including different countries and languages. Some chapters had a spectrum of social-economic levels, and many had successful women of color and people who identified as LGBTQ.

These chapters are clearly doing something right to maintain diversity and an inclusive environment. It was found that these chapters practice very open and welcoming attitudes. Some people said that their chapters became diverse organically, while others made purposeful efforts. They give personal invitations to friends and people they meet at their children’s schools and even invite friends’ parents. They purposefully meet in diverse neighborhoods and locations and seek out women of color at women’s conferences. They have held meetings at mosques and invited Jewish women’s groups too. It also helps if the chapter leader has many diverse friends and connections. Some of the chapters have had success by reaching out to nationalities that DFW grants are supporting and inviting them to be members. In addition, inviting people from social justice groups and international festivals is a good place to find people who are interested in the issues that DFW addresses.

It was found that the chapter leader played a key role in creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for members. Personal invitations and following up after a first meeting or if a couple of meetings were missed was shown to be very effective. Creating diverse menus and meeting in areas closer to diverse populations was effective also. Chapter leaders also discussed diversity at their chapter meetings and also maintained a lot of flexibility in their meetings, listening to their members.
While chapter leaders played a key role, it was also found that members are critical to the welcoming and inclusivity of a chapter meeting as well. They made efforts to introduce new members around the chapter and were conscious of being inclusive. They also found that discussing unconscious bias at meetings was helpful. Members were also successful in tell-a-friend or bring-a-friend efforts in creating more diversity.

The major learnings that these chapters experienced were that diversity and inclusion has to be an explicit focus or it does not happen and that this cannot depend solely on the chapter leader – all members need to be involved. In addition, chapters are more likely to mirror their leaders, so finding diverse leaders or rotating to diverse leadership is extremely important.

In conclusion, the interviews to find “bright spots” of diversity and inclusion yielded much hope in the future of our diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Chapters found that diversity brings richer conversations, people feel good after meetings, and that it feels good to be inclusive and included.

If your chapter is diverse or is seeking to become more diverse and would like to share advice, concerns, questions or celebrations, please reach out to info@diningforwomen.org.