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# Jane Hyun: Switch Your Leadership Style To Manage Diversity

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I recently spoke to Jane Hyun, who is the co-author with Audrey S. Lee of [Flex: The New Playbook for Managing Across Differences](#). Hyun is an internationally renowned executive coach and leadership strategist to Fortune 500 companies, top MBA programs, and non-profit organizations. In addition to coaching professionals to maximize their potential and advance their careers, she advises senior management teams and diversity councils on building effective dispersed, multicultural teams and the critical role of the global talent pipeline. The firm's Cultural Fluency Roundtables and Bamboo Ceiling® Series leadership coaching programs has garnered praise from global Fortune 100 companies in the U.S. and in key global markets.

In the following interview, she talks about why leaders need to adjust their leadership style for inclusion purposes, how to best manage diverse groups of people, the problems that arise if you don't manage diversity, and more.



**Dan Schawbel:** Can you explain the art of “flexing”, why leaders struggle with it and the payoffs if you do it right?

**Jane Hyun:** “Flexing” is the art of switching your leadership styles and behaviors to better communicate with those who are different than you. It’s not about changing who you are — it’s about stretching outside your comfort zone so that you can understand where others are coming from. It sounds basic, but leaders struggle with it because it’s not necessarily what we do automatically! It’s natural for us to relate best with those who have similar backgrounds, expectations, values and perspectives. So we have to learn how to do this – how to meet each other partway, which means considering and understanding a different experience and point-of-view. It might seem uncomfortable and difficult, but leaders who practice flexing will gain fluency in this skill, allowing them to build better relationships up, down and across with their bosses, teams, partners, and customers. And studies show that there is a payoff for organizations who leverage their diverse talent. For example, a Catalyst report shows that having women on your board/executive committees increases the bottom line 73% on sales and 83% on Return on Equity.

**Schawbel:** What can leaders do about the influx of diversity in corporations now? How can they best manage people who are different in order to make the company more successful?

**Hyun:** Increased diversity in the workplace is a given, with 36% multicultural employees and 47% women. And in ten years, 3 out of 4 workers globally will belong to the Millennial Generation. So, even though leaders may not think of

themselves as global leaders, they still have to consider the reality of the changing workforce. We all have to understand that diversity can be an asset to be leveraged rather than just tolerated.

When managing people who are different from you, leaders have to start with self-awareness – understand your own background, influences, values, perspectives. Recognize how that shapes who you are and the value you bring to the company. Then you have to be curious about those who come from different backgrounds. How do they communicate and what might be impacting them? What is their leadership style and is it effective for your organization? How might their differences be an asset? How might they be a barrier? How can you weave their value and style into your team so that everyone can benefit? Learn how to give feedback ... and how to take it, in order to create a more inclusive environment where everyone can define their value and make a difference in the organization.

**Schawbel:** What happens if you aren't good at managing diversity in the workplace? What can go wrong?

**Hyun:** It can mean the difference between full utilization of your workforce and lack of engagement. It is one thing to hire more women, multiculturals, and younger generations into your company, but it takes conscious effort on the part of each manager to obtain their full engagement. There is a cost to disengaged employees: A recent Bureau of National Affairs statistic estimates that U.S. businesses lose \$11 billion annually due to employee turnover.

Knowing how to working across differences will give companies a competitive advantage. Diversity is a strategic imperative that organizations need to leverage. Studies show that organizations who DO understand how to utilize their diverse talent benefit enormously.

The employee you just hired right out of college may have the new idea that you are so desperately seeking to jumpstart the creation of an innovative product to grow your market share, but lacks the level of seniority or exposure to the people in leadership who can activate these ideas, so the opportunity gets lost. That new hire may also need a senior level sponsor to get the idea to the right department head. Quite simply, if you don't tap the potential of your diverse employees when it counts, you can lose them.

**Schawbel:** Explain what the “power gap” is and its effect on a leader's relationship with the people they work with.

**Hyun:** The power gap is the amount of social distance that separates you from your employees. If you're the employee, then it's the distance that separates you from those in positions of authority (manager, etc.). If you're a manager and you are more hierarchical in your preference, the greater the power gap. To close the gap you may need to decrease the distance to connect

to employees. It is critical to manage the power gap in the workplace as your workers from different cultures and different age groups may have different preferences. Some may have a smaller power gap, an egalitarian approach, and they may feel comfortable questioning you openly, and even challenging your line of thinking. Others may place greater distance between themselves and you as the manager, and may hesitate to initiate a dialogue with you or approaching you with questions.

**Schawbel:** How can you use “flexing” in order to attract new talent to your organization?

**Hyun:** One way to “flex” is to examine how new employees experience your company as they come in the door. Onboarding new employees requires an investment of time and resources, so it’s easy for most companies to overlook this process and spend minimal amount of time on this critical phase after someone is hired. Every company has a “way” of doing business and a method for getting things done, and, too often, new employees don’t know how to navigate this when they are hired and many derail because of lack of information and access.

In our work, we have encountered organizations that have helped their employees flex across the power gap by strategically onboarding their employees. Every company has both a formal culture and an informal “unwritten” culture. You as a manager can flex across the gap and help new employees navigate the organization by asking yourself these questions and then making the proper introductions to the right people early in their employment:

**Schawbel:** What are the critical unwritten rules that new employees need to understand to succeed? How can we connect the new hire to the right insiders?

**Hyun:** With proper support, the new team member will be ready to participate fully, and will have a greater likelihood of performing at or above expectations. Moreover, you will facilitate the growth of a company culture that is inviting to new employees, and your brand as an employer will be enhanced as a result.

*Dan Schawbel is a speaker and best-selling author. [Subscribe](#) to his newsletter.*