

JAMIL WEBSTER

Advocate for Inclusivity



As a member of a group that's traditionally been underrepresented, what role do you play in moving the needle about inclusivity?

Great question. Ultimately only people who believe that inclusivity is necessary are willing to have the conversation about it. There are still people today who hide behind the belief that there are no problems of underrepresentation. That because there are rich POC, that the problem of underrepresentation is an issue of laziness or a lack of intelligence from the underrepresented. That these are problems that must be solved by the community. This is where I believe I have a unique opportunity to have the uncomfortable conversations that people are now recognizing they need to be had. I oddly sit as somewhat of a middle child between both worlds where I am looked at as an example that there must not be a problem, and as a person who has defied the odds and made it out.

I want to encourage people to ask the difficult questions, I want to be able to field those questions to the best of my capabilities.

I don't think that I will have all the answers, but I have a ton of life experience to lean on. I only ever want to encourage people to be intentional about being inclusive. And provide somewhat of a guide to how to do that without being offensive. However, I don't believe that it will be me or anyone who looks like me that will be most instrumental in moving the needle. It has to be the industry (whatever industry it is) that has to look at itself and recognize that it has not been intentional about inclusivity.

What advice would you give other leaders to help drive more inclusive cultures?

Intentionality has to be the driving force. Simply being open to inclusion is no longer enough. We've seen people actually find ways around this (look at the Rooney rule in the NFL for proof of this). I am not advocating for a quota or anything of the such. But what I am saying is that if you look around yourself and find that everyone looks like you, you haven't been intentionally making sure that this doesn't happen.

What advice would you give a colleague who may not be aware of their biases that are apparent to others?

I would first remind them that to have biases isn't necessarily a bad thing. We all have them. Its how we act upon them that becomes harmful. Life experience is usually what leads to a lot of biases that people have. I would try my best to encourage them in a way that they wont have to defend themselves that their actions are becoming harmful. Pointing out the harmful actions is the best start. The hope is that recognizing that the action is harmful is the beginning to changing their way of thinking.

What can leaders do to become more intentional about recognizing individuals' talents and skills that don't normally appear on our radar?

I think its important to look past industry lifers. Its easy to continue to hire the same type of people over and over and continue to get the same industry thoughts and results. I myself when applying from this job came from working in the home health industry and was believed to be too over qualified for the position. I can only wonder how someone who believes that they might be under qualified, because they don't have industry experience, would feel applying. I believe that this is how we begin to become more intentional.



iBelongHere
We Can Do Better!

Have you had times where you felt not included or uncomfortable?

In my personal life I am intentional about never being in places where everyone looks like me. On the flip side I am also very intentional about limiting the times that I'm in a place where I'm the only person who looks like me. Often times when I'm in the office at Connexion I feel this discomfort. I don't think that anyone is intentionally trying to make the office feel this way. I just believe that we are intentional about the things that are important to us, and things that are important to us deserves our intentionality.

In our industry, does success have a "face or type"? In your opinion, what does it look like?

Frankly, sadly, successful people in our industry still look like you and Steve. But this isn't unique to our industry. This is still an American problem.

Do you see the industry becoming more inclusive and diverse?

I've worked in operations for Connexion for the last 10 years and the warehouse has always been pretty diverse. The diversity here can be seen from the leadership all the way down to the new hires. But when I think back to all of the customers that I see come and go, there is an evident lack of diversity. Also, when I think about my own company as a whole I'd still like to see more diversity in the office setting.

What is the opportunity for success in our industry?

Personally, here at Connexion, I've felt that the opportunities for me are only limited by my own ambition (or lack thereof). I am aware that there are opportunities waiting for me whether I decide to pursue sales, project management or purchasing. The opportunities are there for me.

Is there a particular individual or mentor who helped push you toward opportunity? Who inspired you?

This really does come down to 3 people:

NIGEL has really groomed as an employee here at Connexion. Taught me the ins and outs of this industry from the ground level, from the perspective of someone that has worked in the operations for a long, long time. His leadership has been invaluable for my career here.

STEVE has probably been my biggest mentor in this season of my life. Not only as an industry mentor, but also outside of work. I've always felt that he has treated me with the best of intentions and truly cares, personally, that I am successful. Whether that is here at Connexion or in some other endeavor that I set out to accomplish. I never feel like he speaks to me from a place of boss/employee. This has become an invaluable aspect of our relationship.

DAVID has always encourage me to be exactly who I am. Allowed me to be exactly who I am. I think, more than anyone, David understands how ambitious I am and will literally tell me to go after it no matter whose feathers I have to ruffle. In addition to this I feel like I can be 100 percent myself. I don't have to worry about hurting his feeling or holding my tongue when I speak. I believe that this is an undervalued aspect of his leadership. I'm not so arrogant though to believe that this is unique to only me.

How can we provide better "PR" for those who don't have advocates?

Is this what people need? I think that people just need a platform to use their own voices. I think about this very questionnaire, and the people or person that formulated these questions. Everyone should have an opportunity to be heard in this matter. Everything won't be great, but giving people a real opportunity to speak, and an opportunity where they're being listened to is a great start.