



In-the-Moment Micro-Coaching

HOW MERCK IS LEVERAGING THE POWER OF
EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION TO DRIVE ACTION
ON DE&I

workhuman*



The workplace has become a platform for social change. Government, investors, advocacy groups, and employees alike are putting pressure on businesses to make positive strides when it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I). Much of that pressure falls on human resources. In fact, Gartner found 64% of chief human resources officers are held accountable for diversity and inclusion progress.

But beyond annual training, how can you sustain and measure change? Where do you even begin? How do you make real progress?

This case study explores how Merck partnered with Workhuman® to develop a more inclusive employee experience through peer-to-peer recognition and in-the-moment micro-coaching.

Why DE&I matters at Merck



It's really important that our policies, our practices, and our systems are truly inclusive of and equitable for all individuals. People want to be seen. They want to feel valued. They want to be accepted for who they are.



CHRISTOPHER CARDARELLI
Executive Director, Global Diversity & Inclusion Center of Excellence,
Merck

DE&I fuels Merck's mission to save and improve lives by being the premier research-intensive biopharmaceutical company in the world. Merck's more than 67,000 employees around the globe provide medicines and vaccines for many of the world's most challenging diseases.

Merck has also been publicly recognized as a leader for its DE&I initiatives, including Best Place to Work for LGBTQ Equality, Best Company for Multicultural Women, and Best Employer for Diversity.

What is DE&I?

Dr. Robert Sellers, chief diversity officer at the University of Michigan, breaks down the distinction between the three terms in a somewhat lighthearted, but highly illuminating way:



Diversity is where everyone is invited to the party.



Equity means that everyone gets to contribute to the playlist.



Inclusion means that everyone has the opportunity to dance.

When each employee brings their own brand of thought to the table, it creates a more innovative, positive environment and a broader, global perspective. The bottom line? A stronger culture and a more profitable company.

Employee recognition as a DE&I primer

One way Merck is delivering on its DE&I promise is through its peer-to-peer recognition program INSPIRE, launched with Workhuman. INSPIRE empowers employees to easily recognize each other for living their company's values through their work and celebrating those moments socially. Employees' enthusiasm for INSPIRE is evident in adoption metrics – in one year alone there were nearly 800,000 moments of recognition on the platform with 100% of the workforce being recognized. What's more, there was a 12-point increase in employee satisfaction with the amount of recognition they receive, according to the engagement survey following the launch of INSPIRE.



Merck believes recognition is a powerful tool in retaining a diverse workforce and has found that new hires recognized more frequently are five times less likely to leave Merck in their first year.

Seeing this positive impact, Merck chose to increase investment in INSPIRE to create the best possible recognition and reward experience for all employees.

What is employee recognition?

Historically, recognition has been tactical in nature – consisting of managers randomly handing out gift cards from a drawer or years-of-service programs that give tenured employees items such as watches or pins.

A comprehensive, social recognition program like Merck’s, on the other hand, leverages technology to amplify recognition and broadcast it throughout your company. That way, everyone can see what your organization values, participate in congratulating and reinforcing those values, and be inspired to emulate them.

When it’s done across all levels of an organization, it strengthens teams and makes work meaningful – and makes companies more successful.



Merck’s INSPIRE platform

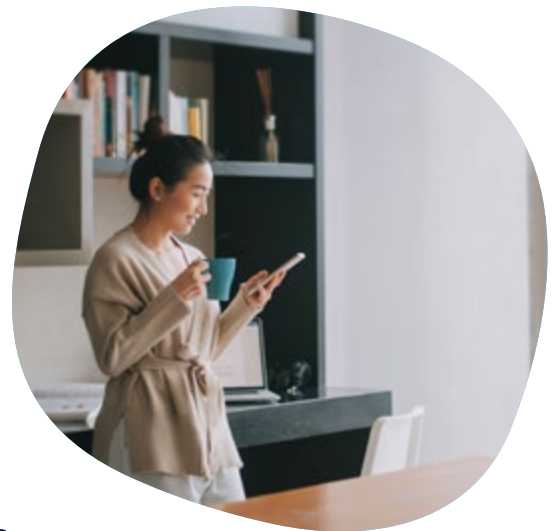
Seizing micro-coaching opportunities

Launching INSPIRE was a positive step in Merck's DE&I journey, providing an additional mechanism for all employees within and across teams to receive recognition. Even further, Merck saw an opportunity to work through recognition – to move DE&I beyond basic compliance.

“When we thought about embedding DE&I into our systems and processes, INSPIRE was one system we grabbed hold of,” says Christopher Cardarelli. “We have an opportunity every 23 seconds to acknowledge, to interrupt the thought, and to make that recognition even better.”

In close partnership with Workhuman, Merck embedded two micro-coaching opportunities into INSPIRE. The first is called Inclusion Reflection, which nudges employees in the process of nominating a peer for recognition.

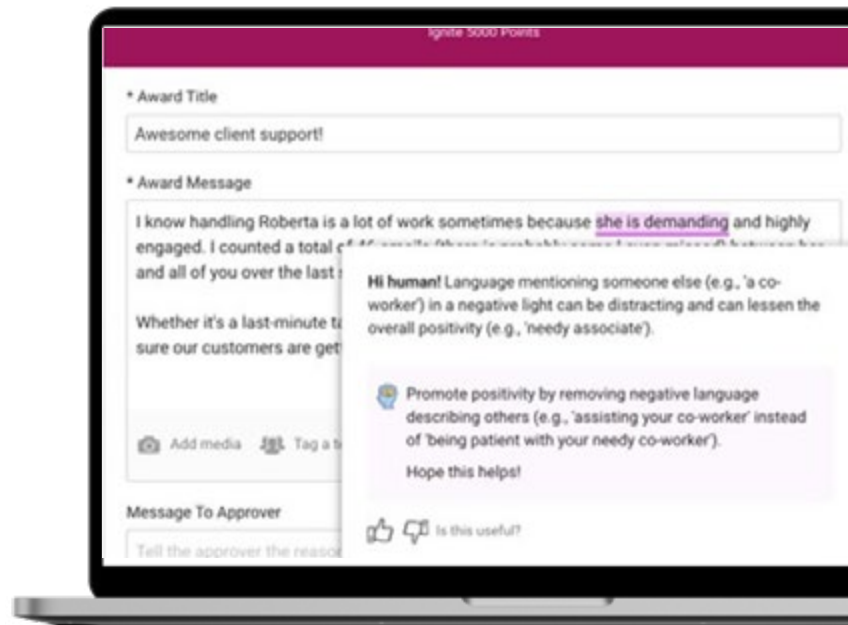
“Are you recognizing the right individuals? Is everybody included? Are you recognizing individuals equitably? Or are you differentiating based on your beliefs or unconscious bias? It's a phenomenal tool,” explains Cardarelli.



The second micro-coaching opportunity is called Inclusion Advisor, a smart assistant that provides in-the-moment micro-coaching to mitigate unconscious bias in written communications.

Workhuman® iQ research indicates as much as 20-30% of all written communication includes some form of unconscious bias. And in an era where many companies are shifting to a remote or hybrid work model, that poses significant risk to employee engagement.

One example of a category of unconscious bias is “cutting no slack.” An example of this language could be: “I know I can always count on you.” As Cardarelli explains, “while intentions are good, the unintended consequence is individuals may feel pressure to always be available, to always say ‘yes’ to requests.”



Inclusion Advisor



If you are human, you have bias. Inclusion Advisor is a positive interruption. It gets you to pause and think about your thinking – because words matter.



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Changing behaviors and mindsets

The results prove these moments of micro-coaching work. Over a six-month period 74% of Merck employees chose to change their recognition message after Inclusion Advisor flagged potentially biased language.

Merck was also pleased that participants said that Inclusion Advisor changed their behavior, not only within recognition, but beyond recognition. Nobody else sees the nudge, so it's the perfect opportunity to interrupt bias and to drive that positive recognition. Engage, pause, and reflect. This approach has really given employees an opportunity to practice these behaviors in their daily lives.



At a time when organizations are searching for ways to track and report progress on DE&I initiatives, technology like Inclusion Advisor could be the answer.

The momentum behind a well-funded recognition program like INSPIRE not only creates a groundswell of goodwill among employees, but it can be the foundation with which an organization begins its critical DE&I journey.



Inclusion Advisor supports your DE&I strategy with in-the-moment micro-coaching, which mitigates unconscious bias in real time. [Find out how.](#)

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