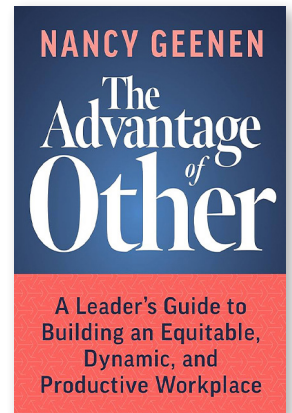


The Advantage of Other

A Leader's Guide to Building an Equitable, Dynamic, and Productive Workplace

by **Nancy Geenen**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Great leaders know how to build a culture of creativity that churns out high-performing teams. These teams then become the greatest competitive advantage a business can have.

The book *The Advantage of Other: A Leader's Guide to Building an Equitable, Dynamic, and Productive Workplace* explores the five pillars that build the foundation of a successful organization. The pages within transform into a personal (and practical) guide for anyone who wants to shape their leadership approach around diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Author Nancy Geenen unfolds a step-by-step journey toward creating a solid culture of inclusivity and building a team that drives your organization toward success. Every chapter of the book overflows with personal anecdotes, recommendations for personal and professional growth, and clear goals and objectives.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Why people are the greatest competitive advantage in our businesses.
- How, as a leader, you can commit to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace.
- About your people, your presence, your pipeline, your profits, and your partners.
- How to build an equitable, dynamic, and productive workplace.

Introduction

Our employees are the competitive advantage in our businesses. This book is designed to support business leaders who are committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace.

Diversity is the representation of many identities and lived experiences. Equity is the access to career opportunities, resources, and tools needed to thrive uniquely in the workplace. Inclusion is the impact on the team member that lets them trust that they are both seen and heard and heard because they are seen.

The best leaders recognize there is a difference between leading and managing. Leading is a way of being accountable to oneself and the team. Managing is a way of holding the team accountable to each other. We have got to create a leadership culture of mattering and belonging in business for both short and long-term sustainability and growth.

Chapter 1: The Power of Story

Before we dive into the broader ideas of diversity, equity, and inclusion at work, I invite you to get curious and approach this book with the wonder of a child. To be child-like is to ask questions and learn new skills, all while being secure in the space of not knowing. The path to leadership has many, many steps, and mastering it requires consistent intention and attention.

We all have a story to tell. More importantly, re-examine the stories that you have always told yourself, and dive deeper into the truths that these stories hold. When we share our stories, we see the similarities and differences among us. From there, we discover how to learn from one another and from one another's stories. Sharing your story is one of the best ways to create and build trust.

Everyone has a very deep need to be seen and heard, to achieve and be accepted, to belong, and to matter. Approach everything with a childlike curiosity. Stay curious throughout your journey. Enjoy being a beginner and enjoy the journey toward mastery, which never ends. To carve a life story worth telling, figure out what your unique ability is, what you love doing, and what comes easily and effortlessly to you.

Chapter 2: Your People

Above everything else, leadership is about giving of your-

self. Your time and attention are the most valuable resources your team can have access to. It's your job to make sure your stakeholders, your team, your customers, your suppliers, and even your wider network feel seen and heard.

Recognize that you're a team. While leadership requires some degree of personal work, the simplest thing you can do as a leader is to refocus your attention on the people you work with instead of yourself. Ask yourself, "What do I love about my work?" "What's not working?" "What tools or resources are needed to do more of what's working?" Instead of only telling your stories of leadership and learning, invite others to tell their own stories. Having the vision and the right team isn't enough. A great leader makes their team trust both the greater organizational vision and the people they work with.

To build a valuable team, think like a coach. Consider every member of your team to be an integral part of your business. The first step to building safety among team members is to make sure everything – from the physical working environment to the workplace energy – feels inviting and comfortable. Lean into diversity. The more diverse a team is, the better its performance when measured against the competition. Recognize your biases and set the intention of interrupting them, making the unconscious conscious. Remember, discomfort isn't a bad thing. It's an indicator of growth.

Chapter 3: Your Presence

So much of what empathy is, really, is presence. It's learning to be comfortable enough in the self, in the present moment, to be able to really listen, without judgment or even the desire to fix or solve the problem. Empathy requires a genuine curiosity and interest in other people and their stories. It means listening without involving yourself in the speaker's story. Your presence as a leader, more than anything else, dictates the effectiveness of your team. As the leadership goes, so goes the rest of the company.

The data from the "great resignation" during the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that more and more people are refusing to put up with a toxic workplace, or an egotistical boss, even if for a hefty paycheck. A leader who holds too tight to the reins, who makes the decisions alone, behind closed doors, will never get full buy-in from the rest of the team. Your confidence should always be tempered with humility. Humble confidence means that the leader is open to sharing challenges as well as triumphs and they are open to advice and recommendations for upgrades.

Recognize your patterns. Try to concentrate on facts and issues. Ask yourself what happened, rather than how you feel about the event or stimulus. Practice presence. When a leader is fully present, they are better equipped for handling those unconscious gestures, facial expressions, and even thoughtless words and actions. Without presence, we are not in control of our actions and what we are communicating likely isn't the information that we want to convey.

Use your time wisely. Prioritize person-to-person interactions or at least, screen to screen, if in-person meetings are not possible. Ask for advice and commit to doing better. Ask everyone on the team for advice on how to do better in the future. Use good listening skills to let your team know they've been heard. Be reliable, keep your word as if your life depended on it. Be accountable and give others permission to hold everyone accountable.

Chapter 4: Your Pipeline

In business, the term "pipeline" typically refers to sales. Leaders should use the same strategies used in sales to nurture and grow their existing talent team. Finding the right people to put in the right seats is a process that starts with identifying a need, defining a function, developing an applicant pool, hiring the candidate, retaining and training the team member, and creating a career path that has positive results for both the company and the team member.

Remember, building a talent pipeline is a process that is relationship based, not transactional. Reexamine your bias about the places from which you can find talent. Building a meaningful relationship with your team is possible only if a leader is comfortable enough to be vulnerable and accessible. Lead the company by example. Create a culture of vulnerability, care, curiosity, and empathy. Create a culture that people will want to be a part of, invest in, and commit to.

Chapter 5: Your Profits

At the end of the day, the business must be profitable to stay open and achieve the vision. Creating a workplace in which people feel seen and heard, is actually an advantage rather than a hindrance to the bottom line.

People are your competitive advantage. The more diverse your group of leaders and management or the individuals who make up your think tank, the faster you're going to grow your revenues. For instance, if you have gender

diversity in your leadership, you are likely to experience a whopping 25% increase in profitability over a comparable company that lacks gender equity in its workplace. Every leader must develop financial literacy to succeed in the business world. The business owner must accept responsibility for the numbers and should be well-versed in the financial status of the company, even if the company has an accountant, controller, or chief financial officer

Focus on your company's Gross profit, operating profit, and net profits (also known as bottom line). The leadership must review each of these profit numbers monthly if they are interested in scaling their business. When it comes to a small or mid-size business, cash is king. You must know your cash position every day. Pay close attention to how much money is coming in and how much is going out. Understand the trends on a monthly or annual basis. This information will indicate whether the business is scaling up, adding more people, more products, and more services to the roster. Develop a dashboard that tracks your finances.

Chapter 6: Your Partners

By definition, a partnership is an arrangement where two or more parties agree to cooperate to advance their mutual interests. A partnership is reciprocal. It must be exactly and delicately fair, even if not equal, in terms of resources, energy, money, skills, and open and honest communication.

Really great partners know that being committed to the partnership means that your best day is a day in which your partner has their best day. But what should you look for in a partner? Considering how much risk-taking is involved in business, it's imperative that you find someone you can trust with your money and your well-being. The process of making decisions, even though only one person has the ultimate authority, is the difference maker. Before finalizing whom you want to partner with, take a solid amount of time to discuss the vision, the core values, the mission of the business, and the exit plan.

Through these conversations, you get to know each other. Spend time together in new and different situations. Learn how each handles stress and emotionally charged situations and how they recharge. Check references, both personal and professional. Finally, plan the long-term strategy before signing documents that bind you together. I have found that my most successful partnerships are the ones that are galvanized by an abundance mindset. We show appreciation for challenging one another and encouraging one another to

Speak the truth and share our visions.

Conflict in partnerships is absolutely necessary. Healthy, vigorous debate, disagreement, and conflict are to be welcomed. If you can get past the initial discomfort, and really go deep to the place of openness and vulnerability, there is a place of agreement. If not complete agreement, then at least a place of understanding, acknowledgment, and gratitude for one another. This level of trust is important for the creativity and transformation that is necessary to keep building and scaling up your business.

Chapter 7: A Purposeful Implementation

There comes a moment in many leaders' careers where they reach a tipping point that requires an intentional decision. You can dig deeper and do the work or continue to tread lightly and perhaps forgo the dream in making this decision. The choice lies between settling for what's "good enough" and choosing to work toward mastery. Because we are so attached to, and comfortable with the status quo, even a small leap may take a massive amount of bravery and then consistent effort. Choosing change may be scary, but it is the way to move forward.

I'm hopeful that the acceptance that we have fought so hard for – the ideas of mattering and belonging, curiosity and care, being seen and heard – will soon be givens. The new generations in the workplace care deeply about company culture which is demonstrated by the diversity of identities at all levels of leadership.

With equity and inclusion already a part of the system, there still lies the need for creating diversity. Improvement in diversity metrics is the result of systemic inquiry and inclusion processes in every function of a company. Choosing a benchmark, and increasing the diversity of your staff by 25% each year requires a commitment to a strategy supported by sufficient resources.

But metrics are not enough to build a great culture. First, leaders must get comfortable with "otherness" and self-identification. So, before you begin this journey towards diversity, equity, and inclusion, really take some time and ask yourself, "What do I stand for? What work have I already done? What work remains? How am I stepping outside of my comfort zone to do the hard work, both on myself as well as within our company?" Figure out what you stand for, and then take a stand.

Conclusion

Becoming a great leader takes consistent and equally great steps. Find a mentor and a coach who can support and guide you on your personal and professional journey. Join a peer network that offers continuing education such as equity and inclusion, financial, and leadership education. Form an Advisory Board because when you have at least five full-time employees or you have crossed the \$3 million mark in revenue, you are going to need a group of subject matter experts who will help you with strategy and growth. Make sure you're always learning and always advancing your knowledge. Finally, stay connected to the most current issues and ideas by reading, listening, and watching thought leaders in the business field.



Nancy Geenen is a serial entrepreneur, and the cofounder and visionary of Flexability, a workplace equity and inclusion firm that has partnered with hundreds of organizations to equip them to build equitable, dynamic, and productive working environments. Prior to that, Nancy spent twenty-five years as a trial attorney, including two years as a prosecutor for the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland.

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