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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Combatting Microaggressions, Racism in the Workplace** **COMPANIES STRIVE TO BE ADVOCATES FOR DIVERSITY & INCLUSION**

**CHICAGO, September 10, 2020** – Companies are facing increased pressure to ensure they have a diverse workforce – in relation to age, race, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, gender, and physical conditions. There are several steps that may be taken by executives who are committed to diversity & inclusion, according to one workplace authority.

“Business executives who want to be advocates of diversity & inclusion have to go beyond simply reviewing policies or naming chief diversity officers, who have a history of high turnover often due to a lack of support for the initiatives they create,” said Andrew Challenger, Senior Vice President of global outplacement and executive and business coaching firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.

Recent news stories bring the necessity to light: Allegations of racism and workplace intimidation have led to an internal investigation of *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, despite the celebrity often promoting a “be kind” attitude on camera. In late July, Nike named a new Chief Diversity Officer, along with issuing a promise to improve diversity and speak out on social issues, according to *The Wall Street Journal*. The Black Lives Matter Movement against police brutality and racially motivated violence continues to grow, including organized protests across the U.S., while the #MeToo movement continues to uncover sexual harassment and violence.

“Companies have to make it clear to their employees, their customers and clients, and their communities that they will not tolerate injustice for any group,” said Challenger. “Being allies to groups that have been marginalized and promoting equality in their workplaces will help companies attract the most talented, diverse workforce. If companies want to be truly

innovative, diversity is essential. Plus, their brand will be associated with trying to right the wrongs of the past.”

Many companies have a lot of work to do in this area. According to Boston Consulting Group, the Fortune 500 has 24 female CEOs, three Black CEOs, and three gay CEOs. According to executive staffing firm Crist Kolder Associates, the average age of CEOs in the Fortune 500 in 2019 was 58.

If employers need more motivation than increasing employee engagement and improving social leadership, they can look to financial benefits. *Forbes* reported in 2019 on a study by management consulting firm McKinsey & Company of more than 1,000 companies in 12 countries, which concluded that more diversity results in greater profitability: For gender diversity, companies in the top quartile are 21% more likely to have above-average profitability, and for ethnic diversity, companies in the top quartile are 33% more likely to be more profitable.

While it has become more common for the C-Suite to embrace diversity-driven policy, an equally important area of focus is inclusion. Does the company promote a culture where everyone feels welcome and no one feels alienated, ignored, or unsafe?

“To begin promoting diversity initiatives, top executives must face the reality of what the current culture is and support – including financially – initiatives that address areas in need of improvement,” said Challenger.

There are multiple steps companies can take to be better advocates of diversity & inclusion:

- **Combat microaggressions.** Realize microaggressions – comments and actions that reveal a biased attitude toward a member of a marginalized group – are prevalent. Listen to employees who have been on the receiving end of microaggressions. Bring employees together and give examples so everyone understands what microaggressions are and how people can be impacted by them. Include self-assessments so employees are made aware of their own unconscious biases. Provide training sessions to help employees avoid unconscious bias in hiring practices and in working together.

“Often microaggressions are unconscious and unintentional. Once they are pointed out to people, discussion should continue to help eliminate unconscious bias,” said Challenger.

- **Review hiring practices.** Create a more inclusive way of recruiting for positions. Advertise openings in-house and encourage employee referrals. Expand recruitment efforts to target universities that have a more diverse student body. Build relationships with organizations that provide a network for diverse groups of potential employees. Establish an interviewing group to review resumes with the demographic information removed to avoid a workforce that looks all the same. Write job descriptions that are

gender neutral. Offer development programs to help level the playing field so employees are prepared for promotions.

- **Encourage best business practices.** Insist on lines of communication being open between employees and managers. Instruct employees on how to report offenses and train managers in how to deal with these reports. Conduct conversations with employees to acknowledge mistakes in the past. Emphasize that company policies will not tolerate discrimination of any kind. Examine pay inequity. Hold workshops to address ongoing issues and increase awareness of needed improvements. Consider financially supporting non-profits that offer support to marginalized groups.
- **Update employee manuals and workplace policies.** Promote multilingual business; offer translation services and language lessons. At company-sponsored social gatherings, include food and drink that appeals to all, such as vegetarian dishes and nonalcoholic beverages. Provide gender-neutral bathrooms and lactation rooms for nursing mothers.
- **Engage employees.** Make sure it is clear to all employees what their role is to the enterprise and that their contribution is important, recognized, and valued. Examine the makeup of teams in all divisions of the company. Switch up memberships. Invite new employees to meetings. Be understanding of how news events affect employees: Do employees need counseling to address their feelings? Do they need time off to deal with their mental health or to attend a protest?

“Executives should solicit feedback and a variety of opinions on policies, projects, and goals,” said Challenger. “The benefits of a diverse workforce are clear. The best talent will be attracted to the company and retained. Additionally, having more viewpoints and perspectives will lead to more innovation.”

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