

DEI TRENDS

The Ins & Outs of DEI Fatigue

BY DR. ARIN N. REEVES

“The most critical time in any battle is not when I’m fatigued, it’s when I no longer care.”

— Craig D. Lounsbrough

One of the challenges of working in DEI is people’s urgent fascination with the most recent DEI concept, topic, or phrase they “discovered” in an article or conversation. The urgency is mostly well-intentioned, but it is often equally not well-informed. Since the DEI “field” is a potpourri of research, advocacy, political ideations, and personal perspectives from multiple fields, it is difficult for people to know which sources of information to trust. So, the most recent DEI encounter — regardless of the source — often becomes the subject of the most urgent fascination.

One of the latest urgent fascinations that has captured our collective attention is “DEI Fatigue.” Over the past few months, I’ve had several emails and conversations with people who are concerned about how fatigued people are after the past few years. I received one email from an executive in a large company that read, “I just read an article on this new thing called DEI fatigue. Is this because of what’s happening politically? Have you heard of this before?”

I sighed deeply when I read this email, and I responded as patiently as I could with, “I wrote about this in 2009. It was called Diversity Fatigue then because most organizations had not yet embraced inclusion and equity. It is not new, but it should be addressed. Let’s discuss in more detail when you get a chance.”

DEI Fatigue is real and important to address, but it is not new.

Wherever there is work to change the status quo, there is fatigue in and about the work. The fatigue hasn’t changed much since I wrote about it almost 15 years ago, except that there are new participants in the dialogue who are maybe experiencing fatigue for the first time, and the people who were fatigued then are downright exhausted now. The fatigue is not new, but it is very real. And it is always a good time to start having a conversation about it.

It is also important to note that DEI fatigue has multiple layers, and people in underrepresented groups that have been fighting for inclusion for years may be experiencing deeper levels of fatigue than people who are newer to DEI work. For example, women who have been working on gender equity and inclusion for years may be experiencing the fatigue differently than women from younger generations who are newer to the

work in the workplace. Women of color may experience the fatigue differently than white women, and women from LGBTQ communities may experience it differently from women who don’t share those identities. All of the women working on gender equity and inclusion may be experiencing fatigue, different groups may be experiencing it at different depths given their personal journeys and experiences.



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Nextions

Here are a few things you can do to check in with people to start (or continue) the dialogue on DEI Fatigue:

- Identify the type of fatigue you are dealing with before jumping into dialogue about it. There are two types of fatigue: one is rooted in working to create change and being tired from not seeing change commensurate with your efforts, and the other is rooted in being tired of talking about changing something that you don’t want to change.
- Acknowledge the fatigue...both types of fatigue. We live in a time when fatigue is seen as a weakness or lack of commitment instead of as a natural byproduct of sincere and difficult effort. Acknowledging fatigue is a way of acknowledging the effort. You are tired because you are trying.
- Recognize how your fatigue may be different than someone else’s. A conversation about DEI fatigue needs to be rooted in the diversity of ways that fatigue can be experienced by different people. Take the time to ask people about how they experience the fatigue and how they are dealing with it.
- Celebrate the wins, even the smallest of wins. The wins in this work often seem inconsequential in comparison to the work that is still before us, but the wins, no matter how small, matter. People get the energy to continue the work by celebrating what has been accomplished. Celebration doesn’t diminish the work that still needs to be done; it refuels us to keep going.

While the article from 2009 does feel like it’s from a different era in DEI work, the 10 tips are still as relevant today as they were 15 years ago.

- Stress diversity as a journey, not a destination.
- Recognize and communicate that progress on diversity is not always a straight-line progression.
- Integrate diversity as a critical thread into all of the functions of the firm instead of focusing on it as a stand-

alone issue.

- Support and reward the individuals who shoulder the responsibilities of leading the organization's diversity efforts.
- Prioritize goals in order to focus energies and resources.
- Mix it up.
- Recognize and encourage all of the different ways in which people generate ideas and contribute efforts.
- Seek feedback from as many people as possible as often as possible.
- Look beyond the organization's individual goals and realities to engage in the profession's collective efforts to diversify the pipeline and the profession.
- When fatigue creeps in, create opportunities for people to "blow off steam."



Fatigue in this work has been with us for as long as this work has existed, and fatigue today does feel more exhausting because everything feels more exhausting today. The fatigue is real, and it's helpful to recognize that you wouldn't be fatigued

if you didn't care about change. Reconnect to the commitment for change, and face the fatigue as directly as you can. Then, move forward to dealing with the fatigue so that we can move past it to the work that awaits us. 📌

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*Arin is intellectually voracious and committed to exploring diverse, and often contrarian, perspectives in her research and writing. She is the best-selling author of *The Next IQ*, *One Size Never Fits All*, and *Smarter Than A Lie*. Her latest book, *In Charge: The Energy Management Guide for Badass Women Who**

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Arin has designed and led comprehensive research projects on topics including gender equity, LGBTQIA diversity, racial/ethnic diversity, cultural integration, implicit bias, transformational leadership, energy management, and working through generational differences.

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