

## Improving D&I is Good for Business, Good for Relationships

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Diversity and inclusion are not buzzwords. They are part of the foundation for sound business practices that build stronger organizations and better products and services. But how do you ensure your company is embracing a commitment to diversity and inclusion? We asked AAPL member Stefanie P. Hines, a former landman and certified petroleum lease and title analyst, to weigh in.

After beginning her land career as an independent in 2003, Hines served as a team lead in the Appalachian Business Unit at Noble Energy, manager of land administration at Murex Petroleum and land administration and land supervisor at EQT. In 2017, she joined West Virginia University as a teaching assistant professor in Energy Land Management, where her teaching focuses on ethics and negotiations, strategic planning, nontechnical issues, title and heirships, and professional experience. Hines also has been a speaker at a national affinity leadership conference on how to engage upper management in D&I.

### **AAPL: How long have you been involved in D&I efforts?**

**SPH:** For the past eight years, I have had the great pleasure and frustration of being involved with diversity and inclusion efforts and initiatives. It is my passionate desire to live in a world that embraces all races, all religions, all genders and all cultures. I am incredibly passionate about the need for not only diversity but ultimately for inclusion of all types of people.

### **AAPL: Where does that passion come from?**

**SPH:** As a Chinese American, as the daughter of a first-generation mother and as the mother of an autistic child, I have a very personal interest in making sure we have an inclusive society. I know from these experiences that having a truly diverse group of people to work with and in my social circle helps me to become a better person and better at connecting with the world around me. My life and work experiences have also encouraged me to fight for these causes. It is a personal crusade for me to help to create a better environment that will grow and create a more diverse and inclusive experience. However, it is frustrating that the work is challenging, slow and often met with resistance — much of which comes from lack of understanding.

### **AAPL: What exactly does D&I mean?**

**SPH:** The definition of diversity is a variety. The application and concept behind diversity in the workplace or academic context is about the recognition of value of all different people whether it be difference in race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, veteran status, education or physical ability. At some companies other factors may be included as well. Diversity therefore has come to mean valuing the authenticity of each individual person and believing each person can be a valuable contributor.

Inclusion is the incredibly important part that takes diversity from just being a mix of people and makes them into successful teams, business partners, friends, mentors, social acquaintances, and more. So often when we speak about diversity and inclusion, we are really talking just about diversity and we forget the crucial inclusion piece.

### **AAPL: Can you give an example of inclusion?**

**SPH:** I recently watched the movie *The Express: The Ernie Davis Story*. It is the tale of Ernie Davis, who was the first black football player to win the Heisman Trophy in 1961. The movie depicts a scene that takes place after the Syracuse football team wins the Cotton Bowl. They are invited to receive their trophies at a country club, but the catch is the star player and game MVP — Ernie Davis — cannot attend simply because he is black. The team chooses to instead eat at a local restaurant.

My own grandparents experienced similar treatment in the 1960s. My grandfather was a doctor from mainland China living in small town America, where he would often be invited to speak at the local country club medical meetings and other civic groups. Amazingly, he would be the keynote speaker, but could not stay to eat. He also could not become a member of the country club.

Inclusion is when you are part of the group — not just a number or a statistic — but when you go from being part of a “different” group to being part of the team.

**AAPL: Why is diversity and inclusion important?**

**SPH:** Having diversity and inclusion as part of your life and at work or school allows people to be their authentic selves. It allows people to think and act freely and comfortably, therefore allowing them to be productive, happy and participatory. It also can open doors for learning, growth, better social interactions, improved negotiations, enhanced networking, and becoming a more well-rounded person who is more open to the world. Studies have shown that organizations that have good diversity and inclusion practices see less turnover, more productivity, happier members and innovations that drive business and learning. They also are highly attractive to top-talent. And of course, good practices are impactful from an interpersonal relationship standpoint which in my opinion is incredibly important.

**AAPL: Can you elaborate?**

**SPH:** When I teach my students about negotiating, we take the time to learn about different cultures, perspectives and concepts. I spend time explaining the need to be open to new ideas and people — especially in the land industry. In this profession, they will need the ability to relate and connect immediately with people who are strangers from all over the nation, perhaps world. It is also very important to create respect for all different types of people and their cultures.

I teach my students about interpersonal relationships and how important it is to build trust and rapport, to value what the other person is saying and telling you. I often have guest speakers who espouse the same lessons that each person you interact with can teach you something, is of value and should be listened to. These are the things that successful landmen already know. Successful landmen are already applying many of these concepts. Great landmen are open to listening to all types of people regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, veteran status, etc.

**AAPL: What are some other benefits?**

**SPH:** Having diverse people in your organization and social circles gives you an insight into communicating and working with people from across the broad spectrum of humans in the world. It gives an ease and comfort to being in new situations and also allows for human connections that come more easily. In my negotiation class I tell the students to scan headlines from all different news organizations and to consider joining clubs or other campus organizations that might be outside of what they normally do so that they can broaden their horizons and learn to connect with people who wouldn't normally be in their circles.

**AAPL: What are some tips for improving an organization's D&I practices?**

**SPH:** I think that too often organizations focus solely on the number of diverse candidates versus inclusion efforts. Too often where the diversity "numbers" look good — that is, they never increase or decrease — what that really means is that you are not retaining diverse talent, and there is a revolving door. In other words, talent comes in and talent goes out. The goal should be to create an environment where diverse talent and students feel welcomed, valued and encouraged to take on leadership roles, training and other opportunities. This is a conscious effort that starts at the top, but it has to be an effort from all parts of the organization. Inclusion means that everyone has to get on board. People must recognize bias that exists and make conscious efforts to create a real process.

I make an effort at WVU to extend out past just my program. I work with different groups on campus and off campus to change the perception that energy land management is a major for just men or just people of a certain political stance. I actively engage with groups outside the typical circle. I have made an effort to create relationships with student organizations and partnerships with different groups to create a space where students feel comfortable to be 100% authentic. We have made a conscious effort over the last three years to encourage diversity and to foster the acceptance of all people. The results have been a steady increase in diverse students, especially women.

I also try to participate in panel discussions/speaking events so that people can get to know me and understand that there are all sorts of different types of people in the oil and gas industry. Leaders who really want to change the culture have to make a concerted effort to create opportunities for open discussions and bias training, and everyone in the organization must truly take on the belief that all people of all types have value and should be respected. In many ways, you can improve D&I practices through education of everyone involved.

Many organizations have employee resource groups or something similar. When these are run well, they can be a great opportunity to create openness, sharing, education and a sense of community, while providing an opportunity to create a line of communication directly to leadership. I think these groups can be a great asset, especially when all people in the organization are involved and the leaders also participate and encourage their reports to do so.

**AAPL: In your experiences, what are some typical challenges to improving D&I and how do you overcome them?**

**SPH:** The biggest challenge is the idea that diversity is the only step taken and that once you hire diverse candidates or once the students are recruited, the work is done. I compare this to planting a garden but forgetting to weed and water it; it needs to be nurtured, cared for and encouraged to grow. It is very difficult to overcome the mentality that if you have diverse talent, that is enough — the end.

What is needed most is a fully supported program that addresses bias, respect, openness, change of power dynamics and diverse leadership. So often diverse talent is hired and then never promoted. Or an attempt to hire diverse talent would fail because highly qualified people would look at the organization and see that while there are diverse people who are working there, there are no people of a diverse nature in any leadership roles or with any hope of advancing. Equity in opportunity is such an important factor that it cannot be overlooked. I also think that taking a one-size-fits-all approach is troublesome. I think each organization needs to look at all the factors and carefully examine what it can do to make improvements or changes.

In addition, I should mention the need to think outside the box. It is difficult to keep up with everything, especially when everyone is busy, but I have found that things like introducing new technology, updating curriculum and thinking consciously about including all people through events, training, and leadership are the most beneficial to making cultural changes.

Finally, we have to be brave. People need to have the courage to call each other out on behaviors that exclude and be brave enough to be themselves and to learn new things.

**AAPL: You've said you like to teach and practice the platinum rule. What is that?**

**SPH:** The platinum rule states that we should "treat others as they want to be treated, and not how we want to be treated." The golden rule was good-natured, but it teaches us to look at everyone from an egocentric perspective, whereas the platinum rule asks that you take time to learn about the other person.

**AAPL: How can that apply to being a better landman?**

**SPH:** To me this is really the crux of a good negotiator and landman learning and listening to the person or people you are working with. The platinum rule requires us to take a minute to help fix cultural misunderstandings and to lessen misunderstandings based upon our differences, and rather than letting differences separate us, we can allow them to bring us together. People who are different have had different life experiences. If we surround ourselves with only people who are similar to us, we will not have the benefit of learning how to relate to different perspectives, innovations and ideas. As landmen, sometimes the ability to relate and understand things from a different perspective can mean the difference between getting the deal done or not.

**AAPL: Do you find that the platinum rule also benefits your other relationships?**

**SPH:** Diversity and inclusion practices like the platinum rule can improve your friendships and personal relationships too. A good example of this is with my own three children. They all have the same parenting and live in the same home together, but each one learns in a different way. I have tried to apply the same techniques to each of my kids, but quickly learned that I needed to adopt a flexible approach, otherwise I would find myself frustrated and at a dead end. Now I know that my daughter needs me to sit with her and help her with her homework, my oldest son is independent and likes to be left to his own devices unless he asks and my son with autism needs a mix of tough love and independence.

In the end, diversity and inclusion is a mindset of how we view the world. We want to be the most successful person possible at work, school and home. Diversity and inclusion can only help.