URL: https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/think-deeply-about-diversity

Software engineer Tracy Chou talks about Project Include, which she helped found in 2016 to build meaningful and enduring diversity into tech companies, describing how the organization takes a holistic approach that starts with core values. She stresses the importance of adopting a comprehensive strategy, not just tactical checklists, to solve a problem as complex as homogeneity.

Transcript

It'd be nice to also talk about solutions.. So a couple years ago, I and a few other women in tech, who would often get together and talk about these issues, were frustrated about all the talk of problems, as I just laid out.. And we thought we should actually start trying to focus on solutions and see what we could do, instead of having the same conversations over and over again.. What came out of those initial discussions, a couple of years ago, was a nonprofit called Project Include, which I'm now a finding advisor to.. The idea was that we need to start giving people solutions.. And there are people who want to do the right thing, and just don't know what to do.. We were often getting people asking us for one-on-one coffee so we can get them some brain dump on what they could do around diversity.. And we thought it would make more sense, it would be more scalable if we actually just wrote down those recommendations and tried to compile these resources to make it easier for people.. But as we came together, we also thought about what it means to have sustained solutions, and ones that actually make change in the long term.. And, we started with core values..

The first of these is true inclusion.. And this idea of not just all be for gender first, which off at ends up being White woman first, because of that proximity to the power structures now.. Think about inclusion that actually encompasses everybody, so instead of widening your circles of exclusion, getting rid of those circles of exclusion altogether.. Thinking about intersectionality, so it's not just gender, and race, and class, and religion, but all these things are crossed with each other, and all these different dimensions of people's and entities, and thinking through solving that in a very holistic way.. We thought it was important that there be comprehensive solutions that are not just this tactic here, and this other tactic here.. People are very into this idea of having a three-point checklist of top three things I can do.. They want to hear about things like the Rooney Rule, which is just make sure you have some diversity in your candidate pool.. And then that will result in better metrics downstream.. They just wanna have these easy check-the-box solutions, but it's not that easy a problem to solve.. It's culture..

It's processes.. It's really deeply ingrained power structures.. And, I would treat diversity, and now it gets to many other things that companies are trying to solve, and say around growth, and trying to acquire users, and monetization and sure there are blog posts of people who say, "All you have to do to solve culture "is these three things." Well that's never the full story.. And people spend a lot of time thinking about, what are the different ways that we can grow our consumer software company? There's all these different hacks you can try, and lots of different tactics you will read about from other people.. But in the end, you need to have a comprehensive strategy.. And you may be able to pick and choose some of these different tactics from other people, but you need to think through the problem holistically.. The third core value we had was around accountability.. That comes from metrics.. Was we had seen before, not having any sort of metrics, it was very easy to say we are working on the problem, and never see any gains.. We though it was important that around diversity and inclusion, we're actually setting goals, and measuring ourselves against those goals...