



Conscious Realization

Awareness can push associations toward solutions and overcome inequities. **BY BOB TAYLOR**

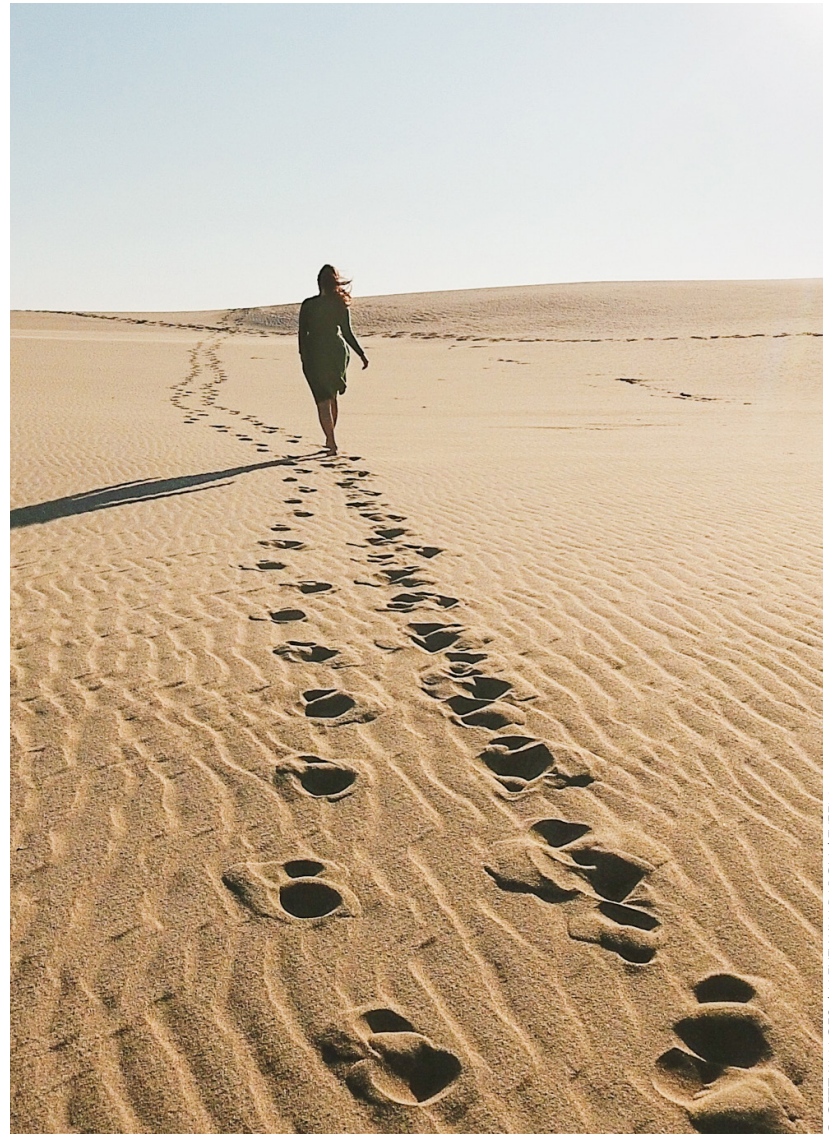


In a diverse group, I would be the SAWC-MOM (straight, American, white, Christian, married, old, male). Over a decade ago, that was my label when I found myself chairing a fair housing committee for my local association. The reason I needed a label was because everyone else had one.

That need to create an identity for me may have been the first time I consciously realized inclusion in a diverse group requires us to all be treated equitably. This means that if there are to be labels, either I need one, no one should have one or—if we have them—they should not define who we are but allow us to celebrate the different perspectives we each bring to the table.

So, for REALTOR® associations, what do diversity, equity and inclusion look like? While every association is different, here are some steps every association can take.

- 1. Discover your diversity:** Think beyond the typical race, heritage, country of origin or sexual orientation and diversity in age, gender, education, income, net worth and so on.
- 2. Educate on equity:** Some associations have been having this conversation for years. For others, it may feel uncomfortable. If you are in that latter category, starting the conversation is the first step. Once you begin, the resources available are significant. For example, read *Speaking Across Generations: Messages That Satisfy Boomers, Xers,*



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Millennials, Gen Z and Beyond by Atlanta minister Darrell E. Hall with a foreword by Haydn Shaw, a leading author and speaker on the five generations. Listen to *Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man*, a podcast by Emmanuel Acho. These will give you the backstory on where we are in America today.

- 3. Investigate inclusion:** For associations with easily identifiable diver-

sity, how is that diversity woven into the fabric of your association? Where your diversity is a bit more subtle, how can you broaden your interactions to include more diverse populations? At our association, we did two things to address how we looked and who we interacted with:

- Eight years ago, the average age of a director on our board was 57 years. One of several



Challenge yourself and those around you to learn from this history and to explore solutions.

changes was a policy that created a board position called “Young Professional Advisor,” involving those new to the business or association or who are simply young at heart. These advisers have become ambassadors, encouraging younger demographics to attend events, participate in committees and become involved in governance. It has also eliminated the notion that you must “put in your time” or that governance is dominated by a system only the favored can join. As a result, we’ve reduced the average age of a director to 47 years.

- We broadened our interactions by joining Fair Housing Centers, Habitat for Humanity, NAACP chapters, etc., and getting members placed on state and national fair housing committees.

One of the most important things you can do is follow the old saying “walk a mile.” As one example, think deeply about how

racial inequity in housing has exacerbated the wealth gap in this country, affecting members of your association and their clients. Say two buyers in 1922 purchased a home for \$5,000. For one, the

home appreciated 5% a year for 100 years. For the other, the home appreciated 4% a year for 100 years, because that person was not allowed to buy in the same neighborhood as the first buyer. As the years progressed, the value difference was:

- After 10 years: \$743
- After 30 years: \$5,393
- After 50 years: \$21,804
- After 100 years: \$404,981

By the way, after just 20 more years, that difference will be nearly \$1.2 million.

Understand the history of the issue, and let it make you angry like it did me. Allow your anger to push

you toward learning more about how systems and structures were put into place. Then, challenge yourself and those around you to learn from this history and to explore solutions. Mere discussion of the problem does not do this. In seeking solutions, work from where you want to be back toward where we are today. It is the fastest way to solve any problem. ●



Bob Taylor, RCE, is CEO of the Grosse Pointe Board of REALTORS® in Michigan.

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