

Considerations when starting faith based ERGs

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Background

- This document is to help add some thoughts to the discussion around faith based inclusion and ERGs
- There are a lot of other good ideas that other companies have considered, thus it also recommended to reach out to the D&I leadership of other companies that have allowed 'formal' faith based ERGs, as benchmarked and previously presented

What is meant by “ERG”?

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are Company-supported and employee-managed groups comprised of employees who share a common background or similar set of experiences, and their supporters. They are designed to:

- Create an environment that values and respects employees for their diverse backgrounds
- Support the business objectives of the organization
- Have open membership and activities to all employees
- Encourage professional development, teamwork, and networking
- Promote positive business relationships

What is meant by the term “faith”?

- Faith, for this ERG and I&D discussion, is meant to cover areas including “beliefs and values relating to a god or higher power”
- Such beliefs affect people’s ideas around purpose, meaning, attitude, behavior, decision-making, and for many are one of the core foundations of their identity
- Examples: Atheist, Agnostic, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Others

Reducing Concerns re: Faith Based ERGs

Things the Faith ERGs Could Be:

- Groups of individuals working towards a shared vision of mutual respect and cooperation despite our differences, paving the way to better diversity and inclusion
- **Welcoming and Inclusive** - create a positive atmosphere for people of all faiths or no faith, so they can bring their full selves to work, allowing and welcoming all employees to participate as they prefer
- **Encourage Dialogue** - focus on knowledge sharing to increase understanding between different backgrounds/faiths/cultures
- **Enlighten** - use education as a tool to fight negative stereotypes, address misconceptions, and foster deeper understanding of and respect for our global colleagues
- **Integrity** – the religions and faith beliefs fully support a culture of Integrity
- **Celebrate and Have Fun!** - share our traditions and holidays in a fun, engaging way
- **Safe Spaces** - work to establish safe spaces for worship, prayer, meditation, mindfulness, etc. in all our offices and large scale events
- **Give Back and Inspire** - establish regular charitable giving opportunities, and partner with nonprofits to help make an impact
- **Intersectional** - partner with other ERGs, as well as other companies on their diversity and inclusion initiatives
- **Love...** “love thy neighbor” is our mantra

Things the Faith ERGs Would Not Be:

- **Isolating or divisive** - we will not promote or prop up any religious group over another, or one belief over another
- Groups could meet and share per their beliefs, but not put down other beliefs, religions, or faiths
- We will not put down or degrade any religious group or worldview
- **Proselytizing** – we will have respectful dialog and understanding, and not try to force beliefs on others
- **Political** - we do not identify with any political party, or promote particular political stances as a group
- We do not expect our leadership to speak out on or take sides in political issues regarding Faith based issues
- **Hate...** we are the opposite of Hate, but work to respect and bless our colleagues!

“It’s too controversial/risky”

Examples:

- Don’t let the media (traditional/social) dictate our attitude towards folks of faith
- Look to the examples at all the 25 companies/govt entities benchmarked to see that it is not controversial or risky, all parties just need to be thoughtful and [respectful](#)
- Other ERGs/topics may have been stigmatized or seen as “too risky” in the past too, and now that idea may seem outdated, we hope the same attitude can apply to faith

Issues Are Few and Far Between

- Other benchmarked companies report very few issues with faith based groups (some with groups of 20+ years experience), please chat with their D&I leaders
- Encourage cross-ERG collaboration and listening sessions while considering faith based ERGs, build bridges early in the process

Faith Beliefs Can Be Important to Employees

How are we doing on Diversity and Inclusion for Faith and/or Religion?

*For many employees, faith and/or religion are an important (and for some the most important) part of their **identity***

Faith and Beliefs are Important to Employees

Even Agnostics and Atheists hold their moral and spiritual beliefs as an important part of their identity

- After deciding whether and whom to marry, [the choice of a job or career](#) is the next major life decision most likely to be influenced by faith, according to a study in the latest issue of the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion.
- The study by researchers at Brandeis University is part of an increasing body of research showing that faith plays a major role in the workplace, from being an indicator of how long employees will stay at one company to how well they do in their jobs.
- The 2010 Baylor Religion Survey found, for example, that more than half of Americans who attend services weekly or more view their work as a mission from God. Nearly three-quarters of frequent attenders say they often or always pursue excellence in work because of their faith.

(taken from: <http://blogs.thearda.com/trend/featured/take-this-job-and-love-it-faith-plays-role-in-workplace-satisfaction/>)

American Airlines Take on Faith @ Work

AA has Christian, Muslim, and Jewish formal ERGs

- American Airlines supports faith-based employee resource groups — all formed through the initiation of employees. "We truly believe that when people come to work, they don't leave their beliefs at the door," says Irene del Corral, senior specialist for diversity strategies at American Airlines and liaison to the company's groups. "You can't walk into your work area and stop being a single mom or a gentleman caring for elderly parents. And you can't stop being a Christian or a Muslim. Plus, she adds, "we find that when you allow people to get together for a common interest ... it just makes people feel appreciated."
- From this LinkedIn article - <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/why-faith-belongs-your-workplace-randy-kay/>

Benefits of Faith Based ERGs

Benefits to Our Company

Improving Inclusion and Diversity

- ❖ **Reduce risk of misunderstanding, conflicts or litigations:** increasing awareness around religious diversity, by opening up about faith and having a dialogue about it at work, we take positive steps forward to appreciate our differences, celebrate our commonalities, and ultimately build stronger relationships with each other – as colleagues and human beings.
- ❖ **Improve customer relation** by better understanding of multi-cultural, multi-faith background, especially with our company's faith based customers
- ❖ **Improve teamwork, morale, productivity:** by communicating respectfully and effectively about different beliefs/religions, to bridge open and trusting interactions among employees
- ❖ **Increase job satisfaction:** by help meeting the needs of employees with diverse beliefs
- ❖ **Differentiation from competitors:** Keep our company on the cutting edge when it comes to I&D, be a differentiator.
- ❖ **Improve recruitment and retention:** by strengthening our reputation for diversity and inclusion generally, and with respect to religious inclusion particularly
- ❖ **Improve professional development:** by providing mentoring programs, educational programs and connect employees with role models
- ❖ **Religious respect and accommodation:** faith based ERGs can serve as an internal focus group on religious accommodations the company is considering (such as Quiet Rooms for prayer, meditation, and reflection).
- ❖ **Increase profit:** higher productivity will result in better products/services, better understanding of market/customers, more effective communications throughout the organization, higher contribution to community service → eventually help strengthening corporate image

Benefits to Employees

Many benefits similar to other ERGs

- **Morale:** Improves morale, productivity, longevity at the company
- **Relationships:** Relationship building, mentorships, encouraging connections
- **De-stigmatize** faith topics
- **Inclusive:** Support employees of faith to “bring their whole self to work” and “be their best selves” ~ faith and religious beliefs can be an integral part of employee’s lives
- **Retention:** Improve employee tenure, longevity at the company – developing positive workplace relationships is one of the best things an ERG can do
- **Respect:** Facilitate mutual respect
- **Growth:** Further access to opportunities, visiting speakers, learning sessions, etc.

Benefits to External Parties

- **Prospective Hires** – helping on talent acquisition, recruitment – make our company an employer of choice in faith communities, faith colleges, faith job boards, etc.
- **Customers** – leverage identity to help company win new business (a number of medical hospitals have faith-ties)
- **Volunteering and community outreach** – most faiths have a strong support for helping the needy and volunteering

Benefit to Company Culture:

Virtues Christians Pursue that Are Beneficial to Workplace Culture



Reducing Workplace Bias and Promoting Faith Based Inclusion

A More Inclusive Culture

Tyson Foods [Attitude](#) as an example

- When all beliefs and ideas are expressed in the workplace, everyone benefits. Faith and spiritual commitments are valued and respected.
- The culture we'd want is "faith-friendly." Many of our team members come to work with a set of beliefs about themselves, their world and how they should live in it. We welcome their respectful expressions are welcomed. the whole person, when it comes to matters of faith, even those who don't identify as "religious." Our team members' beliefs matter and their respectful expressions are welcomed.

10 Bias Danger Signs

Continued Work at Reducing Religious Bias

From Tanenbaum [organization](#).

- We are not saying that our company is doing these things per se, but in starting faith based ERGs, we could review how well we are doing at each and work towards respecting faith more in our company

- 1. ATTIRE** Employees are barred or discouraged from wearing facial hair, certain hairstyles, or garb – even if religiously motivated.
- 2. DEVOTION** Employees encounter difficulties when requesting time off to pray, meditate, or reflect during the workday, or in locating a quiet, private space.
- 3. DIET** Work-sponsored gatherings offer limited kosher/halal/vegetarian options.
- 4. HOLIDAYS** Employees have a difficult time securing vacation/paid time off for their religious holidays or observances.
- 5. ICONS** Religious icons or devotional objects are discouraged or barred from personal workspaces.
- 6. NETWORKS** Determining whether to establish individual faith groups, an interfaith group, or no religious groups at all poses a challenge.
- 7. PRAYER** Mandatory company meetings and celebrations include prayer.
- 8. RIDICULE** Employees are mocked because of their religious beliefs, practices, or garb.
- 9. SCHEDULING** Work shifts and meeting schedules disregard significant religious holidays.
- 10. SOCIALIZING** Employees are labeled as anti-social when they don't attend company-sponsored parties for religious reasons.

Questions to Consider in Religious Diversity

Full list at <https://tanenbaum.org/programs/workplace/workplace-resources/religious-diversity-checklist/>

- Does your company's diversity policy specifically include religious diversity?
- Do you know the general religious demographics of your employees?
- Does your company have a clearly articulated policy regarding religious holiday leave (paid or unpaid)?
- Does management take into account the different faiths of employees when planning holiday events?
- If an employee's religious practice conflicts with the dress code, does the company have policies in place regarding attire accommodations?
- Do the food providers at our sites have meals that accommodate unique religious and ethical needs of your employees (kosher, halal, vegetarian, etc.)?
- Does your company allow the formation of on-site religion-based affinity groups?
- Does your company have a policy regarding decoration of personal workspace (within one's office/cubical, walls in public areas, the employee lounge, etc.)?
- Does your company allow religious practice in the workplace (prayer, meditation, etc.)?
- Do your employees have avenues of communication by which they can express their specific religious practice needs?

Improving Faith / Religious Accommodation and Understanding

From: <https://tanenbaum.org/programs/workplace/workplace-resources/eight-steps-to-the-accommodation-mindset/> and <https://tanenbaum.org/programs/workplace/workplace-resources/>

1. Get the Facts – demographics and faith trends in the workforce
2. Recognize All Employees' Needs – those of various faiths and those with none
3. Ask Respectful Questions
4. Identify Any Limitations of what the company can provide after collaborating well to verify limitations
5. Be Creative in meeting the needs of the employee and company
6. Communicate policies
7. Educate folks on varying faiths and diversity
8. Institutionalize throughout, not just a select few in the I&D function

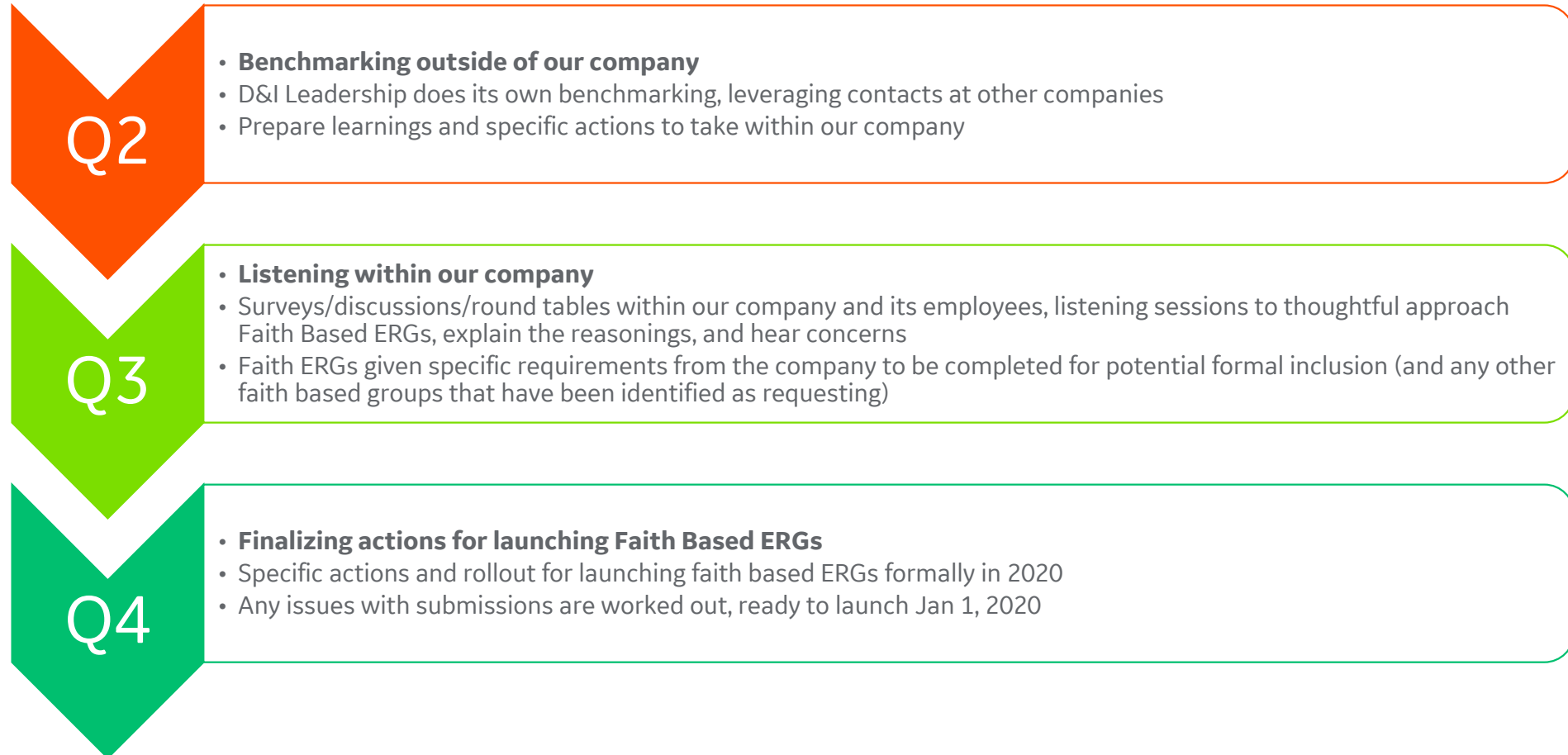
Starting a Faith Based ERG

Our Suggestion/Ask: Faith-Specific ERGs, including a Christian faith ERG

- **Religion-Specific ERGs:** specific to one faith/religion, e.g. Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Agnostic, Sikh
 - ❑ Like the Apple or Target Corporation models
- Can be a good starting point for grass-roots requests from employees
- Every Faith ERG must be inclusive and open to employees of all faiths and none
- Consideration: if employees of any religious/spiritual tradition complete their charter and meet requirements, all religious/spiritual groups could be allowed to form

Example Timeline

A 9 Month Journey



Faith at Work: Accenture Article

<https://thriveglobal.com/stories/faith-at-work-taboo-or-welcome/>

Let me offer three pieces of advice if you would like to start [Faith ERG discussions] in your workplace:

- (1) Involve experts and faith leaders to help facilitate early discussion
- (2) Set ground rules about listening, transparency, respect and trust
- (3) Be inclusive

Starting Religious Employee-Resource Groups

Points Aetna's journey, from <https://www.diversityinc.com/resource-groups-2/starting-religious-employee-resource-groups>

- "It was perceived as risky—not something corporate America has embraced fully," Arroyo recalls. "There was concern that there would be disruption in the workplace and the feeling that if we supported some groups, others would object."
- "I maintained that this a business-case issue," Arroyo says. "If you align it with our values, then you don't have anything to worry about."
- Aetna requires that at least 10 employees sign up before a group can start and a charter has to be approved, showing that the group's goals align with the company's business focus. The group also has to have an executive sponsor who is a senior manager. The group must be inclusive—anyone can join, regardless of whether they are actually affiliated with the group represented.
- Kerrie Peraino, senior vice president of international human resources and global employee relations at American Express, discussed the importance of aligning the groups with corporate values. "There must be an environment where personal accountability and integrity permeate through every action and transaction. When you start with a work culture that is inquisitive and values alignment, there's more room for various beliefs to be expressed and constructively contribute to employees and business success," she wrote in an issue of DiversityInc magazine.