SHIFTING GEARS
CALIBRATING INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES

Conversation & Takeaways

What we heard at Shifting Gears

Three clear themes came up again and again:

Participants are afraid of saying the wrong thing, failing, being judged, and the social consequences of speaking up.

There's a genuine uncertainty about what "creating space" really looks like in the day-to-day reality of a workplace.

When deadlines, budgets and business pressures take over, inclusion can feel like something that can wait.

Sometimes the barrier isn't a lack of willingness. It's our environment.

Underneath these individual barriers are larger structural challenges: limited decision-making authority, generational resistance, and organizations that aren't always aligned on what they're trying to accomplish.

What's holding other people back?

When participants thought about other people, more potential barriers emerged:

- Financial and profit pressures that can crowd out investment in culture
- The cyclical nature of project-based work, where momentum doesn't always carry forward
- Personal biases and stereotypes that go unexamined
- A lack of meaningful incentive to engage

Is your team truly inclusive?

Most participants feel their team is truly inclusive — but there's room for improvement. As a group, they pointed to something important: **inclusion isn't a destination. It's a practice.** It shows up in the everyday choices we make: being proactive, being willing to try something new, and offering genuine rather than performative support.

Recruitment and retention go hand-in-hand

Every organization invests in recruitment. But what happens after someone walks through the door? **Culture is what makes people stay.**

Retention deserves the same attention as recruitment. If people aren't staying, we need to understand what's driving them away.

The conversation also touched on the disproportionate impact of workplace toxicity and the risk of women leaving industries altogether.

Bringing other people into the conversation

One of the biggest challenges isn't convincing those who attended Shifting Gears – it's reaching the people who didn't.

- How do we start the conversation with someone who didn't attend Shifting Gears? What do they need to hear?

Changing the conversation starts with leadership:

- choosing a message
- communicate it consistently
- genuinely believing in it

We don't need to build something new

There's important work already happening. STEMforGIRLS and the Built Collective are examples of programs that are creating opportunities and advancing this conversation. Sometimes the best move isn't creating something new. It's helping amplify what already works.

Three key takeaways:

1. To see real, lasting progress we need more people having the tough conversations. What do men who didn't attend Shifting Gears need to hear to shift their perspective?
2. Don't overlook retention. Building a safe, inclusive workplace where people want to build a career is as important as recruiting the best talent. If you're experiencing staff turnover, determine what's driving it and address it.
3. The demand for practical skills is growing. Most people recognize the importance of inclusive workplaces, but freeze in tough situations. Learning how to navigate and implement diversity in the workplace is a critical next step.