

Spreading the IDEA of Diversity & inclusion in Tech

By John Samuel, Chief Innovation Architect, LCI Tech

In the summer of 2017, I decided to move home to the Triangle, and was actively looking for jobs online. What I noticed as I was combing through career pages, LinkedIn, and Indeed, was that the bulk of job openings in the area were linked to tech, and for someone who had spent the previous 8 years focused on African investments, things didn't look promising! Not to mention, I was losing my sight and I was struggling to complete online applications because they weren't usable or even accessible for people using assistive technology like myself.

Up until deciding to move back home to North Carolina, I had never openly disclosed my disability during the application phase, because I was fearful that companies would see it as a liability and screen me out. What changed my decision to disclose this time was I heard many companies in the area had active Diversity and Inclusion programs, and that they would be more open to the idea of hiring someone who was blind. Unfortunately, things didn't work out for me with these organizations, but I did land on my feet with an amazing opportunity at LCI where I've led the launch of [LCI Tech](#).

My initial thoughts and beliefs were that diversity and inclusion programs were a compliance initiative to check a box, and people like me with disabilities weren't a box that most companies wanted to check off. This was backed up by the fact that most diversity and inclusion committees and programs did not include people with disabilities, despite 20% of the population identified as having one.

This forced me to rethink about what diversity and inclusion means to me. When I was looking for companies with a diversity and inclusion program, I searched for a team where I felt I belonged. This sense of belonging defined what diversity and inclusion meant to me, but to achieve this, there also needed to be equity and accessibility – building a new acronym, IDEA.

IDEA stands for Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility. A true, holistic approach for diversity and inclusion.

Over the past few years, I have found a sense of belonging in the diversity and inclusion community here in North Carolina, with the same people who weren't responding to my emails. But like myself, their views and thoughts have evolved, the fact that NC Tech invited me to be the keynote at their inaugural Diversity + Inclusion Tech Summit shows how things are progressing, and how the tech industry in North Carolina is trying to build a sense of belonging of all people.

I want to thank the NC Tech Association for the honor of being their keynote and providing me a platform to share my story and engaging in a lively Q&A session. If you weren't one of the 400 plus people who attended the event (or if you did attend, but want to relive the fun!) you can check out my speech [here](#).

Whether you're new to tech, or diversity and inclusion, I urge you to get involved with NC Tech and feel that sense of belonging – and who doesn't want that!