

# Jared Pope of Work Shield: 5 Steps We Must Take to Truly Create an Inclusive, Representative, and Equitable Society



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**As** part of our series about '5 Steps We Must Take To Truly Create An Inclusive, Representative, and Equitable Society' I had the pleasure to interview Jared Pope.

*Jared is Founder and CEO of Work Shield, the only start-to-finish workplace harassment and discrimination reporting, investigation and resolution solution that protects employees, employers and cultures at the same time. Jared practiced law and ran a practice focused on human resources, ERISA, benefits and employment matters for over 15 years and is a knowledgeable resource on workplace culture and harassment and discrimination issues. Connect with him on [LinkedIn](#).*

**Thank you so much for doing this with us! Before we dig in, our readers would like to 'get to know you'. Can you tell us a bit about how you grew up?**

**I** grew up in Granbury, Texas with a hardworking single mom who was a social worker, my older brother, and my twin brother. Given our difficult circumstances to make ends meet, my brothers and I needed to find ways to help the family financially. I started working at twelve years-old bussing tables so that I could buy school clothes and other necessities. Despite these circumstances, my mother taught us the importance of being grateful for what we had, staying positive, and the value of hard work. My hard work continued through selling books door-to-door for three summers to help finance college and working a 20- to 30-hour week job during law school.

It was during law school I became intrigued with ERISA, benefits and income tax law, which laid the professional foundation for where I am today. After law school, I built my tax and compliance knowledge while working at amazing companies and law firms such as KPMG, Baker Botts, and Apex Global Partners, and eventually started my own law practice, which to be honest was both thrilling and nerve-wracking. While running a practice focused on human resources, ERISA, benefits and employment matters, I learned about business, startups, healthcare, insurance, and what makes a company successful.

In addition to running my law practice, I also became involved with some other startup companies, but the one that allowed me to combine both my business and law expertise is Work Shield. I founded Work Shield in 2018 because I was tired of the inadequate solutions available to employers who wanted to implement real, impactful change in order to protect their employees. I wanted to create a solution that allows employers the ability to address the inappropriate behaviors that permeate our society and workplace cultures. I desired a solution for employers that doesn't just "check the box," but actually empowers employees' voices to be truly heard.

**Is there a particular book that made a significant impact on you? Can you share a story or explain why it resonated with you so much?**

I have a strong connection to *The Greatest Generation* by Tom Brokaw. I initially was drawn to the book to get a perspective on what the lives of my grandparents were like, but I came away humbled by the immense sacrifice this generation gave of themselves for the freedoms we continue to enjoy today.

This generation grew up in a time of great struggle and sacrifice and dutifully answered the call during WWII to honorably serve their country. And when they came home these men and women continued to live their lives as everyday heroes, changing the world for the better and reminding us all of what we are capable of as people when we step up. I think it is incumbent upon us to learn from those generations who paved the way before us, and this generation teaches us about grit, service, courage, and responsibility in the face of adversity — all qualities applicable to today's times.

When I think of everyday heroes today, I think of the sacrifice that countless essential workers have made this year in the face of the pandemic. These

men and women have courageously stepped up to serve and in many cases, save the lives of others, despite the dangers to themselves and the risks placed upon their own families. It is truly inspiring to witness the impact that these people have had on humanity, and I hope they can encourage us all to step up, in any way possible to be heroes in our lives every day.

**Do you have a favorite “Life Lesson Quote”? Do you have a story about how that was relevant in your life or your work?**

Control what you can control, and let go of what you can't.

This sounds like it would be easy — to just control what's in your control, but realistically it's the letting go part that gets me more often than not. 2020 is the best example for testing this life lesson, both personally and professionally.

Professionally speaking, our team at Work Shield had certain goals we wanted to hit and various projects to complete to attain these goals. Then COVID-19 happened, and everything came to a screeching halt in March. Our team began working from home, as did many of our clients' workforces. Many of them had questions relating to how they should handle their employees during COVID-19, but we all know there is no best practices guide for employers on how to successfully survive a pandemic. This was a “first time” for everyone.

As a team, we realized that we were going to have to adapt and adapt quickly. We tabled the projects we had originally slated and began thinking about how we could provide clients with resources to better deliver our service and also to help them get through this time. We embraced the uncertainty by innovating our client onboarding process and creating resources such as a monthly client e-newsletter, which synthesizes and condenses relevant articles and media spotlights highlighting our expertise on managing the challenges of COVID-19 and the workplace, while also maintaining a diverse and inclusive workforce.

In hindsight, simply controlling our environment by adapting with these pivotal changes ended up adding more value to our clients than the projects that we had originally slated. The hardest part at the beginning was initially tabling these projects, without knowing if what we were implementing would be successful. But letting go of most of the plans we had for the year

was necessary to free our headspace to focus on the current landscape, what we could control.

**How do you define “Leadership”? Can you explain what you mean or give an example?**

Leadership is best summed up through the quote, “Attitude reflects leadership” from Remember the Titans. In the movie, the team football captain calls out the unfavorable behavior of a teammate, and the teammate replies, “Attitude reflects leadership.” It’s easy for leaders to point the finger and blame others when things go wrong, but leadership involves taking personal responsibility. Attitudes play a crucial role in effective leadership in all areas of life, from leading a company to coaching energetic second-grade boys on the soccer field.

I realize that my attitude greatly impacts my effectiveness as a leader, and my attitude and behavior tell a story about what I value. For instance, I value an inclusive and safe workplace culture for my team, so I know I must set the right attitude and engage in the inclusive behaviors myself to result in an inclusive and safe workplace culture for my team. How can I expect my team to carry out the behaviors and actions that contribute to an inclusive culture if I don’t role model them myself?

**In my work, I often talk about how to release and relieve stress. As a busy leader, what do you do to prepare your mind and body before a stressful or high stakes meeting, talk, or decision? Can you share a story or some examples?**

As a former miler and an NCAA Div. I runner for Texas Christian University, I always loved running. When I was younger, I mainly did it for fun, and I couldn’t get enough. Now that I have more years and miles of pavement behind me, I appreciate the benefits running brings me in this different season in life. When I have something that I know is going to take significant time, thought, and energy I often grab my shoes and hit the streets.

While I’m running I find peace in the solitude and the rhythmic beats of my feet hitting the pavement. In its truest sense, it’s a form of meditation for me. When my mind is solely focused on the “now,” it sheds the worry or concern I might have for an impending meeting, presentation, or tough discussion. And the result is that when the run is over, I have more clarity

about whatever it is that I have to do, along with the confidence and resolve to see it through.

For those who are not runners, finding any activity that allows you to move your body and get out of your head is just as beneficial. Moving your body brings you into the present moment and it gives your brain a break from working nonstop. Our minds are already overloaded, especially this past year, so taking the opportunity to give it a much-needed rest is essential. You'll come back to whatever is waiting for you less stressed and with more certainty and awareness.

**The United States is currently facing a very important self-reckoning about race, diversity, equality and inclusion. This is of course a huge topic. But briefly, can you share your view on how this crisis inexorably evolved to the boiling point that it's at now?**

It really has hit a boiling point, hasn't it? The crux of this boiling point is silence. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s saying, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter," rings as true today as it did in the midst of the civil rights movement 60 years ago.

As a whole, we have remained silent about the inequities and injustices that have led to the crisis impacting our communities and workplaces. And you have to look at both communities and workplaces together because what happens in the workplace is often a reflection of what is currently happening in our society. It doesn't matter how many times the media covers atrocious acts of racism or blatant discrimination in society or how many company reports and surveys are released outlining the racial, gender, and LGBTQ inequities in workplaces if the people who have the capacity to help remain silent.

With the injustices we've witnessed this year, many people have spoken out against them, but as we've learned, simply speaking out is not enough. Unless we put our words into meaningful action, we are complicit. Those who have experienced systemic racism and/or discrimination are suffering, fearful, and in pain. For healing and belonging to even be a possibility for them, their voices must be truly heard, and met with bold and courageous action by those who can effectuate lasting change.

**Can you tell our readers a bit about your experience working with initiatives to promote Diversity and Inclusion? Can you share a story**

**with us?**

It is incumbent upon me that Work Shield, whose vision is to create safer workplace cultures centered around diversity, inclusion, and equity for all, is part of the solution to the social injustices we face today. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) conversations and actions are essential to repair the harm resulting from such injustices. For example, COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on racial and ethnic minorities, and we have learned through the BLM movement that not all voices are heard equally in both communities and workplaces. And that's a troubling problem.

When employees can report incidents of harassment or discrimination without fear of retaliation to an impartial resource who will treat their concerns as a top priority and work to resolve incidents quickly, everyone wins. We have always been vocal about the importance of companies focusing on DEI initiatives so that impacted employees can heal, move forward, and bring their best selves to work, knowing that their voices matter. Work Shield's socially driven mindset and commitment for effectuating lasting, positive change in workplaces is disrupting the Human Resources and DEI industry by providing a solution that allows for all employees' voices to be heard and acted upon.

What truly motivates our team at Work Shield are our client success stories — such as learning that one of our clients, who historically had high turnover prior to implementing Work Shield, now enjoys a significantly higher retention rate and a safer workplace for their employees. It is also encouraging to learn that employees believe their company is supporting them by providing an avenue where their voices are truly heard by someone who is not only listening, but responding as well. In fact, we received calls from employees thanking Work Shield for being there to listen to them and ensuring a clear path to resolution on their specific issue(s). It is in hearing these personal accounts that we witness the positive impact we are making to our clients' DEI initiatives by helping protect their employees and company cultures.

**This may be obvious to you, but it will be helpful to spell this out. Can you articulate to our readers a few reasons why it is so important for a business or organization to have a diverse executive team?**

Without question, the case for diversity within organizations is compelling. We know that companies with the highest rates of diversity and inclusion

are the most successful, fully utilizing the wide range of traits and experiences that these employees bring to the table. And we know job seekers consider workplace diversity an important factor when considering employment opportunities.

The paramount reason for a company to have a diverse executive team is that diversity must start from the top down if it is going to be successful within the entire organization. Companies that tout their diversity efforts while lacking a diverse leadership team send a silent message to their employees that such efforts are simply lip service.

This is where the mindset “attitude reflects leadership” kicks in, and if diversity is important to the organization, it must be supported and represented by a leadership team that reflects the diversity they seek for the rest of the organization. Diversity efforts cannot solely be relegated to HR personnel or a company’s DEI officer. None of a company’s other DEI efforts matter if it isn’t represented at the top first and foremost.

**Can you please share your “5 Steps We Must Take To Truly Create An Inclusive, Representative, and Equitable Society.” Kindly share a story or example for each.**

Workplace cultures are a microcosm of what is going on in society. To create a better society, we must focus on the workplace culture, which then permeates throughout our communities. As we think about the “5 Steps,” we can actually boil this down to three simple steps, while understanding that steps 2–3 don’t matter unless the first step is correct.

That first step is making sure employees’ voices are heard, truly heard. This encompasses all matters related to workplace culture, diversity, inclusion and equality. To understand what the true issues are, we must first create an environment or platform that allows employees to be truly heard without fear of retaliation.

The second step to being heard is making sure the voice is intently listened to. This sounds easy, but far too often companies and individuals just shrug off what was being said or asked of. To truly hear somebody, you intently listen so you can understand their fears, pains, beliefs, joys and frustrations. This is ever more present with today’s society and the impact that DEI has on all employers.



The final step once voices are heard and intently listened to, action must be taken to ensure a clear path forward. Action must be taken to ensure resolution. Action must be taken to enable a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace culture. These actions can be as simple as understanding a workplace dynamic or situation, to ensuring bad actors or the suppressors of others' voices are no longer able to maintain such divisive actions.

It is through these three steps that employers can create and commit to workplace diversity, inclusiveness, and equality. What is received in return? A society that is built on these principles and better equality.

A prime example of these three steps is in each of our 200+ clients on the Work Shield platform. Specifically, one of our clients had a culture that experienced high levels of turnover. Some thought it was simply the "industry norm." The CEO, HR, and C-level executives were looking for a better way to provide a more inclusive workplace. They turned to Work Shield, which implemented the three steps above. Within six months, the client significantly reduced their turnover rate, removed the bad actors that were creating toxicity, divisiveness, and exclusiveness and they now enjoy a happier, healthier culture for all of the 1,000+ employees.

**We are going through a rough period now. Are you optimistic that this issue can eventually be resolved? Can you explain?**

Absolutely. The turbulent and disturbing events this year have made it impossible for employers to ignore the relevancy and impact of DEI. As we focus on purposeful action and efforts internally within workplaces, the result should not only be diverse and inclusive workplaces, but also more caring, inclusive, and equitable communities.

Company leaders are showing their commitment. This past year I became a signatory to CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion™, the largest CEO-driven business commitment to advance diversity and inclusion in the workplace. This strategic commitment starts with acknowledging that addressing diversity and inclusion is not just a workplace issue, but is also a societal issue. More than 1,200 CEOs of the world's leading companies and business organizations are leveraging their collective voices to advance diversity and inclusion in the workplace, and I am honored to be among them.

Communities are also making efforts to create lasting change, demonstrating that commitment to DEI spans beyond the workplace. Earlier this year, I welcomed the opportunity to make an impact on DEI in the local community by joining the Texas Christian University's (TCU) Alumni DEI Committee. Even my children's schools have made efforts to strengthen and advance DEI priorities by providing programs and hiring new administrative positions to handle this critical diversity and inclusion work.

In short, DEI is essential in order to create and foster inclusive and safe workplace cultures and communities. Voices are being heard, and equally important, action is being taken. There is still a long road ahead, but we are collectively headed on the right path.

**Is there a person in the world, or in the US, with whom you would like to have a private breakfast or lunch, and why? He or she might just see this, especially if we tag them!**

Well, there are several people to be honest. That said, I would enjoy a breakfast or lunch with Elon Musk. As a visionary entrepreneur who co-founded PayPal, Tesla Motors, and SolarCity, and is the founder of SpaceX, his ability to execute on his strategy and vision is amazing! With similarities to Steve Jobs, Howard Hughes, Henry Ford and Bill Gates, he has taken his work ethic and passion to places only people dare to and has been able to drown out the "noise" that entrepreneurs sometimes hear day-in and day-out from the nay-sayers. Instead, he just accomplishes what he wants without reservation and in ways to make the human experience better, safer and more enjoyable. He will be remembered for decades to come. I would like to remember a breakfast or lunch with him for my decades remaining!

Business

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