INCLUSION

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Creating Globally Inclusive & Culturally Competent Workplaces

KORN FERRY
HAY GROUP

Powering the Future: Diversity, Collaboration, and Innovation

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Some people excel at talking about the importance of diversity and inclusion. Others also implement it. Audra Bohannon is such a doer.

Bohannon, a senior client partner for the global talent, executive search, and organizational advisory firm Korn Ferry, works with clients to help organizations optimize their global workforce and advance women in organizations worldwide. Her position comprises consulting, facilitation, executive coaching, and other outcome-oriented roles. She works with a broad range of employees, from C-level executives to entry level.

Bohannon, who is based in Korn Ferry's Boston office, has 30 years of experience implementing diversity and inclusion. Prior to joining Korn Ferry

> **There is a war for talent. [Organizations] must see diversity as an asset and not a liability.**

in 2008, she was a senior vice president for Novations (acquired by Korn Ferry in 2008).

Bohannon, a graduate of Wayne State University in Detroit, is a sought-after speaker on topics related to corporate development and diversity and inclusion. She sits on the national boards of Community Builders and Accelerated College Experiences and serves on the Human Resources Committee of Big Sisters Association of Greater Boston.

Inclusion: What are the biggest issues and challenges for a corporate diversity and inclusion leader today?

Audra Bohannon: One of the biggest challenges is the emotional turmoil that results from what's going on in the world: the politics, the impact of technology, and the speed at which we move. Emerging markets are becoming business centers, thrusting us into doing things differently. Virtual engagement with others pushes up against traditional "face time." Talent and markets are even causing organizations to physically move to urban areas to more effectively do business.

These challenges can be particularly stressful for individuals who feel pressure to prove themselves due to their diversity, or who confront conscious or unconscious bias about their potential to be valued contributors.

Organizations still have a way to go to ensure that all people, especially those of underrepresented groups, are provided with working environments in which they are supported, well positioned, and engaged in challenging work. There are still deep and unresolved issues around race. Even with diversity broadly defined, within most organizations, people at the director level and above are still predominantly white heterosexual males.

IN: There is much greater emphasis in recent years on inclusion. Has that superseded diversity as the focus?

AB: Many organizations are exhausted by the diversity challenges they face—that things are not changing and results are lackluster. As a result, sometimes I wonder if the "D" in the title

Audra Bohannon in conversation with Alma Coyne, Phoebe Ramler, Katherine Feliciano, and Alison Levine.

"Diversity and Inclusion" is becoming "lowercase"—that is, perceived as less important. Diversity and inclusion are important. Organizations can be diverse and not inclusive. Organizations can be inclusive and not diverse. Both are important and critical to meet the business challenges of today.

IN: What brought you to do this work?
AB: I've always wanted to give back. I volunteered at Head Start when I was 13 years old. I created mock tests and administered them to my friends to help them do better in school. I always found ways to help others. This motivation compelled me to work in the diversity and inclusion space when I saw the opportunity to partner with colleagues to build a practice that is committed to support people—especially those who are underrepresented—and organizations to be their best.

IN: Tell us about your greatest success story.
AB: I don't have a "greatest success," but many "great moments." These great moments are about helping organizations and individuals see—see the possibilities for a better tomorrow. For organizations to see how to better serve their customers and employees and to be able to embrace building cultures of inclusion that compel employees to fully engage. For individuals to see their possibilities and how applying focused effort can make those possibilities a reality.

IN: What are some of the recent thought-leader topics in the world of inclusion that organizations are learning about and implementing?
AB: Integrating diversity and inclusion with talent development. Diversity is the issue; development is the answer. Giving careful thought

to what it means to be diverse and inclusive. Assessing leadership and holding them accountable to inclusive leadership competencies. Grounding D&I transformation in data analytics. Becoming more vocal about the need to drive D&I into the DNA of their organizations. I am intrigued by the work of Dennis Nally, CEO of PricewaterhouseCoopers, who is encouraging other CEOs and organizations to champion diversity and inclusion, not just for compliance, but to drive effective change and improve corporate cultures. Another example is the Proudly Me campaign at Salesforce to support its evolution into a truly inclusive culture.

IN: The accelerated globalization in recent years has greatly influenced diversity and inclusion strategies. Will the focus of our new administration on "America First" affect diversity and inclusion?
AB: The reality is we live in a global economy—that's not going to change. The United States has 350 million people out of the world's 7.28 billion. "America First" may have impact for a few years, but in the overall scheme of things, it will be a very small factor. Organizations and individuals who were silent are talking publicly about inclusion because they feel they can no longer sit on the sidelines and be overlooked. Organizations are providing safe spaces for employees to have conversations around diversity and inclusion. These examples give me hope that when we come out on the other side, we will be better for it as organizations and as a country. Can "America First" impact progress? Yes, it can slow it down a bit, but in the end building inclusive environments where everyone can do well no matter their difference will prevail.

IN: As more millennials join the job force, and as baby boomers slowly age, has this phenomenon provided challenges for your clients?
AB: It's a huge challenge for our clients. There are so many people with institutional knowledge who are exiting the workforce. The group entering the workforce now has different ideas around work—where to work, what type of work I want to do, how I will

Audra Bohannon leading a meeting with Korn Ferry colleagues.

work. It's an interesting conundrum for organizations to think differently about hiring, developing, and retaining. Some of our clients are offering "reciprocal value mentoring," which is mentoring that goes in both directions. They each have interesting perspectives that can be helpful to the other.

IN: How will the CDO role change in the next five years?

AB: More will be expected of everyone, especially those in leadership roles. We can't ignore that we are living by "robotic time"—fast and evolving—but we are still in the end dealing with sentient beings. Therefore, CDOs will need to work more closely with their executive teams as true business partners and integrate D&I goals with business objectives. CDOs will continue to be central in helping organizations recognize the importance of leveraging all talent to meet business goals. CDOs will need to continue to push against and lead the change of organizational traditions, policies, and informal practices that do not embrace growth for all.

IN: How does a company best cultivate a diverse talent pipeline?

AB: Organizations must recognize that there is a war for talent. They must see diversity as an asset and not a liability. The relevant organizations must be intentional and posi-

tion the diverse pipeline for growth. They must provide their diverse resources with visible, important, and complex assignments, and surround them with people who want them to be successful, and will give them feedback on what is working and what is not. Organizations must tell them the truth so they can get better, and see them for their potential and engage them the same way the few "go-to" employees are engaged. All people want opportunities to develop and advance.

IN: For a number of years, practitioners of diversity and inclusion have been making the business case for D&I. Do you think this message is sinking in? If your clients do not fully buy in that a culture of diversity and inclusion is a competitive advantage, how do you convince them?

AB: Organizations always want data to prove that diversity and inclusion make a difference in performance. The message is sinking in because the data are showing that diversity and inclusion are good for business. Research shows that diverse teams that are well managed will outperform a homogenous system, but they must be well managed. Even with the data clearly spelling out the benefits of diversity and inclusion to the bottom line, studying the numbers is not enough. Companies need to be deliberate rather than indiscriminate, proactive rather than reactive, and committed rather than compliant, to harvest the energy necessary to create real change.

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I have been in the diversity and inclusion space for a long time. I have connected with thousands of participants who have the following in common: they are good, talented, and committed individuals wanting to contribute at the highest level. However, because of their differences, many face strong, invisible headwinds that leave them feeling marginalized, undervalued, and limited in possibilities. So much potential is not being realized! That is the bottom line: smart, progressive organizations that want to prepare themselves for a rich future need look no further than their people—all their people. The answer is right in front of them if they care to look.

I challenge organizations to honestly assess the current state of their organization as it pertains to diversity and inclusion, implement a strategic process to address the areas of concern, and hold everyone accountable (in the spirit of shared responsibility) to do their part, just as organizations do in all other aspects of their organizational life that they deem important, critical, and necessary to survive and thrive. It can be done. It just takes courage, commitment, confidence, and guts to tackle one of the most challenging issues of our time—diversity and inclusion. *IN*