

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO
MUSLIM AMERICAN INCLUSION

THE ROI
OF D&I

IS SYSTEMIC UNCONSCIOUS BIAS
HOLDING YOUR COMPANY BACK?

INCLUSION

WINTER 2018 + ISSUE 3

*Creating Globally
Inclusive & Culturally
Competent Workplaces*

UNITED WAY
WORLDWIDE

Powering
the Future:
Diversity,
Collaboration,
and Innovation

DARLENE
SLAUGHTER



Darlene Slaughter

Vice President,
Chief Diversity
Officer, United Way
Worldwide

When Darlene Slaughter became United Way Worldwide's chief diversity officer in 2015, she was coming full circle.

In 1986, while working at AT&T, Slaughter served as a "loaned" officer to United Way, part of a program that loaned executives to United Way for six months to help with a campaign.

Today, Slaughter, who lives in Laurel, Maryland, leads United Way Worldwide's efforts in advancing its diversity and inclusion strategy in the United States and around the globe by recommending, developing, implementing, and managing both internal and external diversity-related strategies, partnerships,



programs, and initiatives. United Way Worldwide, founded in Denver in 1887, mobilizes nearly three million volunteers in 1,800 communities in more than 40 countries to help people in the areas of education, financial stability, and health.

Prior to joining United Way Worldwide, Slaughter served as the principal consultant and chair of Linkage's Institute for Leading Diversity and Inclusion, where she trained corporate leaders on developing and leading diversity and inclusion initiatives in the workplace. Before Linkage, she led D&I initiatives at Fannie Mae as a vice president.

Slaughter has won many awards and honors for her work. She was named to *Savoy* magazine's 2012 list of Top 100 Influential Women in Corporate America; *Profiles in Diversity Journal's* 2011 list of Women Worth Watching; *Black Enterprise's* 2011 list of Top Executives in Diversity; and *Heart & Soul's* Women of Substance in Finance.

She holds an MS in human resource management and organizational development from American University and a BS in elementary education from Howard University. She is on the board of Pass the Torch for Women and the Springboard Foundation.

Inclusion: What will be some of the biggest upcoming issues and challenges for a corporate diversity and inclusion leader like yourself?

Darlene Slaughter: The biggest challenge will be helping individuals and organizations deal with old issues. Depending on the sector, this means still making the business case, getting leadership to see the strategic value of diversity and inclusion in the workplace, and helping all employees build the courage and muscle to have conversations about a variety of things such as race and racism, privilege, sexism, ageism, discrimination, and technological changes that impact how work is done.

IN: There is a much greater emphasis in recent years on inclusion. Has that superseded diversity as the focus and, if so, why?

DS: I think the shift is focusing on inclusion. However, diversity cannot and will not go

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away. While diversity is still very much about the characteristics and the numbers we each bring to the table, inclusion embodies diversity. Inclusion is how we make people feel and/or belong in the workplace. I do think that, at times, the conversation around inclusion is a much easier conversation, but we are not all the same with the same experiences, and therefore understanding diversity and promoting diversity become invaluable for an organization. The two concepts help to build cohesion and collaboration.

IN: What brought you to do this work?

Is there a personal motivation, a story from your childhood or past that inspired you in this direction?

DS: I came into this work many years ago from an education and human resource background. While I did not think of myself as a

CDO, it became apparent that it's the role I had been playing all along. My passion and major in school were to become an elementary school teacher. The passion for teaching has stayed with me, and I have been able to use that skill in this role. It is actually the perfect role for the background because you are constantly learning and teaching not only at an individual level but also at the organizational level. I like the quote, "It doesn't matter what you say you believe—it only matters what you do," from Robert Fulghum's *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. This is the essence of diversity and inclusion. It's about treating others—and being treated—in a manner that preserves dignity and respect.

IN: How has your approach to D&I changed in the last 10 years?

How have you seen the field, thinking, and best practices change around D&I?

DS: The role takes courage and creativity. Being successful can sometimes be a double-edged sword. You have to be bold, take calculated risks, preserve individual dignity, and have hard conversations with very senior people that can easily make you the scapegoat. It's a role where you, as the professional, experience the same biases that you are guarding your employees from, or you have the same privileges and are not able to process the biases that do exist for others.

Over the years what has helped me to be successful and stay focused is to stay grounded and understand that the role is one of leverage, coaching, and creating tools for others to solve human interaction problems. What's fascinating about the role is the new stuff is always the old stuff. It still comes down to how do people work together effectively to be productive and increase the return on investment for companies and feel respected and valued as employees?

IN: Presumably, when you hire, you want to be sure the potential candidates are a good fit for the company and its mission. How do you hire? What factors do you take into consideration and what questions do you ask?

DS: As a CDO, you stay in a constant mode of making connections and potential sourcing [of new employees]. As that role has an external function, I'm always aware of open positions and looking for talent through a variety of diverse channels. A recent example was someone who was interested in a position at the company, but had decided not to apply until I tweeted the opening. This [job seeker] called and said that because they trusted my approval of the position, they would look at the opportunity. There are several examples where people know the CDO, and that attracts talent to the organization.

The CDO has to play an intake role and ask questions not only of the hiring manager but of the applicant as well: What's needed? What are the requirements? What are the growth and development opportunities? What support systems are in place to make that hire successful? There's a synergy between the hiring manager, human resources, and the CDO to be effective in creating a diverse workforce.

IN: How do you measure success in terms of diversity and inclusion? Retention? Organizational alignment? Participation in inclusion activities?

DS: Measuring success is always top of mind. The difficulty is that measurements take time, and many organizations want quick results. Bridging relationships, getting people to become conscious about their actions and impact, changing behaviors, etcetera takes time. Yes, you can certainly measure recruitment/hires when it's strictly about diversity numbers. The bigger challenge is measuring inclusion, where people will stay because they have landed in the right places to excel and develop. You can measure the number of activities held within the organization, but the question is, are we thinking about diversity as part of the strategic business plan or just activities? I can certainly feel good about being a part of that, but at the end of the day am I seeing real change in attitude and actions?

IN: The accelerated globalization in recent years has greatly influenced D&I strategies. Will the focus of our new administration on "America First" affect D&I?

DS: Most definitely. It does not stop corporations from being focused on global initiatives because that is the space they are in. How "America First" is affecting organizations is through the people we hire and keeping our people safe.

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Even if a company is US based, its talent is global. “America First” principles can go against the employee base that we are attracting. The D&I strategy has to become more comprehensive—so that people are not leaving parts of themselves at the door, and the problems, fears, and concerns are coming into the workplace, and are being addressed.

IN: As more and more millennials join the job force, and as baby boomers are slowly aging, has this phenomenon provided challenges for you? What are your tactics for addressing them?

DS: I think the biggest challenge is understanding the characteristics of the groups while making sure we are not lumping all behaviors and beliefs of employees into big categories. I read a book not long ago that spoke about human equity—which posits that we look at the person as a whole, and not just at physical features, cultural background, or work experience—and I believe that is where we are evolving. Everything we do has to be about inclusion and human equity. Individual needs that make up the whole. Millennials and boomers have lots of similarities. It's just that their way of achieving them is different. The transference of knowledge is critical. Millennials want mentors, and boomers have a lot to share! It's about bridging the relationships.

IN: How will your role change in the next five years? Will more be expected of CDOs?

DS: I think the role will continue to evolve, and while the title may stay the same and the reporting structures may stay the same, CDOs will be brought in [to companies] because of their wide breadth of knowledge on the fronts of politics, social justice causes, economic and demographic changes, human behavior, organizational development, and transformative change. The role of the CDO is one of constant learning and the ability to make sense of data—even using artificial intelligence—to predict trends that allow organizations to recruit and retain the best talent. It's not only a very visible role for the organization—it's one that keeps you very grounded to what is happening every day to the people from the C-suite to the staff. Not many roles have both internal and external implications. **IN**