

**WORKPLACES AND
MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES**

**INTERSECTIONALITY:
WHY IT MATTERS**

**CORPORATIONS ARE TAKING
A STAND ON THE ISSUES**

INCLUSION

WINTER 2019 + ISSUE 4

*Creating Globally
Inclusive & Culturally
Competent
Workplaces*

DIVERSITY STRATEGIST

**LENORA
BILLINGS-
HARRIS**

**Leading the
Charge on
Implementing
Inclusive Practices**





Lenora Billings-Harris

Diversity Strategist & Speaker

Lenora Billings-Harris is a diversity and inclusion thought leader who works with companies to leverage diversity and increase inclusion, reduce the impact of unconscious bias, and thereby increase each company's bottom line.

Billings-Harris has been named among the 100 Global Thought Leaders on Diversity and Inclusion by the Society for Human Resource Management and was named one of the 20 top influential diversity leaders in the United States by *Diversity Woman*. Billings-Harris recently delivered keynotes in Cape Town, South Africa, and Tel Aviv, Israel, to share best practices with leaders in business, government, education, and NGO communities.

"The workplace is the primary location where people experience some form of diversity every day."

She coauthored the book *Trailblazers: How Top Business Leaders are Accelerating Results through Inclusion and Diversity* and is the author of *The Diversity Advantage: A Guide to Making Diversity Work*. She also serves on the adjunct faculty of the business schools of Averett University and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Her team at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro conducted award-winning research.

Billings-Harris has presented in 37 countries. She is a past president of the National Speakers Association (NSA) and was the 2014–2015 president of the Global Speakers Federation. In 2016, she received the NSA's Cavett Award, the highest honor bestowed upon professional speakers in the United States. In 2018, she was inducted into the NSA's Speaker Hall of Fame.

INCLUSION: What will be some of the biggest issues and challenges in 2019 for a corporate diversity and inclusion leader like yourself?

Lenora Billings-Harris: Clarifying what diversity and inclusion really is from a business perspective continues to be a never-ending challenge. Many people, at all levels of their organization, still think it is only about EEO compliance. Diversity focuses on who is on the team—do people look alike and think alike, or is there diversity in many ways? The first step in my work often includes helping executives reframe D&I so they see the goal is to attract the best talent, which leads to diversity of thought. Diversity of thought leads to innovation and better decision making and problem solving, which then leads to higher productivity and profits.

Once leaders reframe their understanding of workplace diversity, they can explore ways to attract a broader mix of talent. The next issue is to find ways to create an inclusive environment that enables talent to produce at their highest level. Executives committed to an inclusive environment understand that D&I is not "just an HR program"—it impacts every level and every department of the organization. Most importantly, they understand that creating inclusivity and equity is everyone's responsibility. Leaders focus on transformational strategies instead of easy tactics to achieve their aspirational vision of inclusion.



Billings-Harris speaking at the Citrix Synergy Conference (2017)

IN: In the last year, gender inequality in the workplace—including sexual harassment—has become large in the public eye. We all know that these challenges are not new. How does this new public awareness help close the gender gap?

LBH: Women and men who have been harassed or discriminated against due to gender have become empowered to speak their truth. Because they know there is worldwide support to stop sexual harassment and identity bashing, more people are willing to speak up. However, having the courage to speak up is still difficult. According to the EEOC, harassment of all types and retaliation charges continue to rise every year. Companies committed to advancing D&I are offering harassment prevention training. They are not assuming that nonharassing behavior is simply a matter of common sense.

In regard to the gender pay gap, some organizations have gone public in their efforts to create gender equality in the areas of hiring and pay. They are so committed that they are willing to have the public hold them accountable. This is a major shift in the way organizations address gender inequity regarding pay in the United States since, culturally, Americans do not discuss salaries openly. Some countries, such as Sweden and Norway, require corporations to share this information. Uncovering the systematic bias in hiring and pay practices helps companies make sustainable changes.

IN: There has been a much greater emphasis in recent years on unconscious and implicit bias training in companies. Why is this training so important? Does it work? How can it be done better?

LBH: You cannot change behaviors if you do not know that some behaviors are ineffective or produce a result different than what was intended. Unconscious bias training opens the door to discovering how unintentional actions impact productivity.

Exploring unconscious bias, especially through an interactive workshop experience, is a positive way to help people discover that bias is normal—all humans are biased, and all biases are not negative. When unconscious bias sessions are designed and facilitated well, the participants develop an understanding of how our brains capture information and apply it to our

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beliefs and attitudes about others. They discover that our biases determine our behavior, and unconscious bias is more pervasive than expected. Leaders learn how names, accents, schools, and even height impact hiring decisions.

Learning and development programs

can be effective only if they are followed with goals and metrics to implement new behaviors and address systematic bias. Herein lies the problem. Organizations often do not commit the time and resources needed to do this type of follow-up.

When businesses make a concerted effort not only to offer unconscious bias training but also to commit to uncovering intentional and unintentional biases in their hiring and employment practices, they discover the changes needed are not difficult to implement. For example, several companies use blind-screening practices such as omitting names, schools, and year of graduation from résumés. They focus on job requirements, company goals, and clearly stated tangible and intangible talents needed for the specific unit or team.

IN: What are some of the recent thought leader topics in the world of inclusion that organizations are learning about and implementing?

LBH: Unconscious bias is the hottest topic, and executives are leading the charge to introduce it within their organizations. They learn a little about bias at a conference and then decide to do something in their organization. The concept of belonging is on the rise as the next hot topic because it is so closely related to bias.

Next is generational diversity. There are four and in some companies five generations working together. The accusations and insensitive comments that people make about others not in their generational group can be brutal! One