

WORKPLACES AND  
MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

INTERSECTIONALITY:  
WHY IT MATTERS

CORPORATIONS ARE TAKING  
A STAND ON THE ISSUES

# INCLUSION

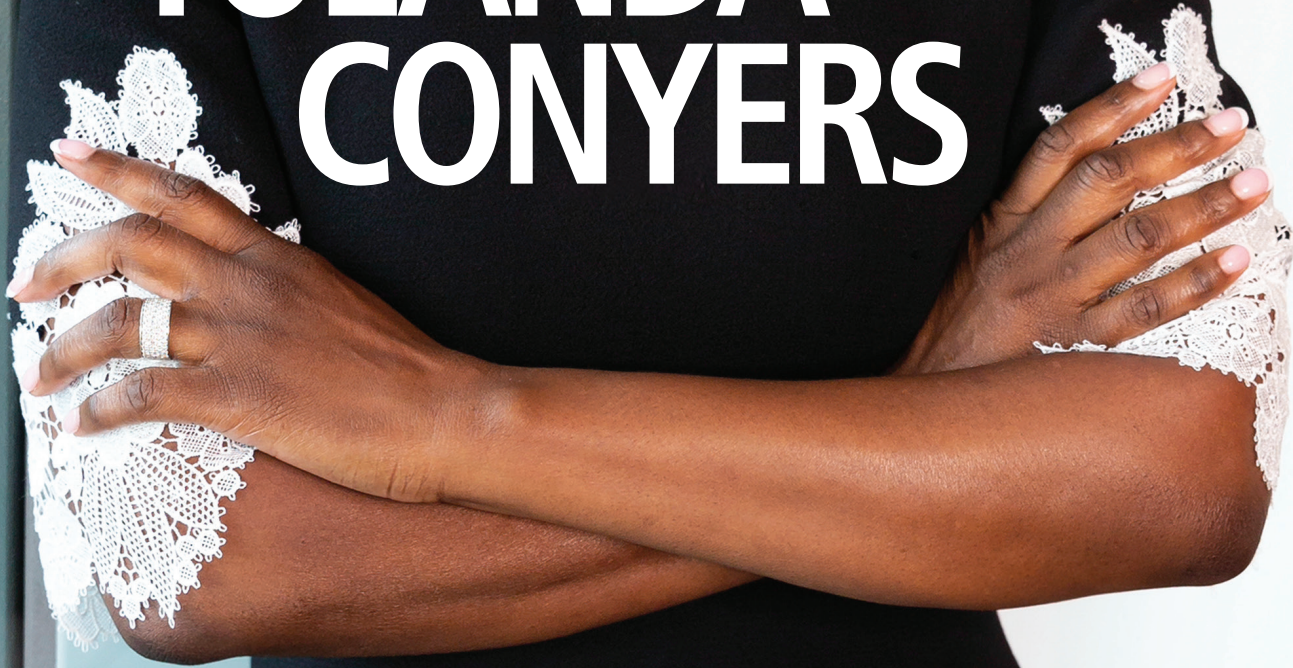
WINTER 2019 + ISSUE 4

*Creating Globally Inclusive  
& Culturally Competent  
Workplaces*

Leading the  
Charge on  
Implementing  
Inclusive  
Practices

LENOVO'S

YOLANDA  
CONYERS







# Yolanda Lee Conyers

## Chief Diversity Officer and President, Lenovo Foundation

**Y**olanda Lee Conyers has been instrumental in the transformation of Lenovo into a culturally integrated global brand. Throughout her career, she has consistently developed and executed HR strategies and people development initiatives that enable businesses to surpass their most challenging goals. Her areas of expertise include cultural and change management, leadership coaching and development, talent acquisition and retention, organizational effectiveness, and performance and incentive management.

**“Today we have to innovate with a purpose.”**

Prior to joining Lenovo, Conyers was a business leader of global organization at Dell, and earlier in her career, she worked as an expert in data-driven analytics at Texas Instruments.

In 2016, Conyers received a Distinguished Alumni Award from her alma mater, Lamar University, where she graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science. She holds a certificate in advanced human resource management from the University of Michigan and an MBA in international business from the Our Lady of the Lake University executive program. Conyers is the co-author of the 2014 book *The Lenovo Way: Managing a Diverse Global Company for Optimal Performance*.

**INCLUSION:** What will be some of the biggest issues and challenges in 2019 for a corporate diversity and inclusion (D&I) leader like yourself?

**Yolanda Conyers:** One of the biggest challenges in 2019 involves helping organizations shift from a focus on diversity to a focus on diversity plus inclusion. Different perspectives and ideas are integral to developing diverse products that allow us to live in a smarter world. Today, we have to innovate with a purpose and it's not so much about what the purpose is, but what that purpose can do. It must be engaging and productive. This type of innovation requires different mind-sets.

We conducted global research into the D&I space, and we found a significant shift in values, with people placing high importance on inclusion. They also ranked equality, responsibility, and justice in the top 10. This signaled a move to a more group-focused mentality, with individuals craving a sense of belonging in society. To create an environment where employees feel a sense of belonging, acceptance, and equality requires D&I to be truly embedded in an organization's culture. Our approach to doing this focuses on building inclusive behaviors, systems, processes, and policies, as well as holding employees at all levels accountable.

**IN:** What brought you to do this work? Is there a personal motivation or a story from your childhood or past that inspired you in this direction?



Conyers speaks before the Bratislava chapter of Lenovo's flagship employee resource group, Women in Lenovo Leadership.

**YC:** My inspiration for this work comes from my father. I am from a small town called Port Arthur in Texas, known for one of the largest refinery networks in the nation and for its seaports. My father was a seaman, and he traveled around the world on ships. He gained so much knowledge from his travel experiences and meeting different cultures. My father told me to travel around the world, embrace the unfamiliar, and never stop learning. I have developed this passion for understanding differences from my father. This passion, plus my desire to solve problems as a trained engineer, has led me to this work of creating cultures that leverage diversity to solve business problems.

**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?

**YC:** You can't have an inclusive culture if you don't have a strong stance against harassment. Lenovo takes this topic seriously. It is a guiding principle across all our countries. In late 2017, along with our chief legal counsel and HR women leaders, I reached out to all

our employees and asked them to speak up if they experienced any harassment.

We followed up with anti-harassment training in the United States and finished rolling out training globally for every Lenovo employee by the end of 2018. We are dedicated to reminding all new managers and employees as they join about our commitment to a harassment-free workplace and to retraining our managers and employees every two years.

As part of our compensation practices, we regularly monitor whether we are in line with our three tenets: pay for performance (exceptional performance warrants exceptional compensation), market competitiveness (attractive compensation compared to the market), and equal pay for equal work (we want to be fair). We have not found any broad systemic inequities, but where we come across them in individual cases, we take targeted action during our annual compensation cycle, and we react quickly.

**IN:** What are some of the particular challenges for the tech industry around inclusion?

**YC:** As an industry, we must do a better job creating a pipeline of diverse talent in STEM fields. At the same time, we must ensure that we break down any barriers for underrepresented groups to advance in the workplace. This is why we've worked with organizations such as the National Academy Foundation to teach more than 5,000 high school students across the United States how to develop mobile apps, and we've supported this further with internships at the high school level. We also focus on developing executives within Lenovo through programs like the Women's Leadership Development Program and Mosaic program. These programs provide sponsorship for high-potential women and underrepresented groups. Since its inception, the Women's Leadership Development Program has served more than 60 female employees, promoting 39% of the participants to executive roles.

**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?

**YC:** Our systems, processes, and policies are only as good as the people who create them. Just as with the new technologies that are forming the backbone of intelligent transformation, we must demand that these new models driven by artificial intelligence, artificial reality, augmented reality and more are inclusive—that the data and algorithms are taking in diverse sets of data. You can't have intelligent transformation without inclusivity. To deliver on our commitment of reducing bias in the recruitment process, we implemented unconscious bias and difficult conversation training for recruiters in the United States beginning in 2017 and will be expanding this program globally through 2019.



**IN:** The concept of intersectionality has moved from college campuses into the workplace. How is this concept being applied in companies by D&I offices?

**YC:** Identity is complex. Far too often in the D&I space, we've been approaching the conversation from a single story. And a single story is a very dangerous path because it doesn't allow us to hear all voices, and that's damaging. While women have made advances in the workplace, it has been mostly white women who have benefited. Had we focused on intersectionality, we might have seen more women of color and women of different sexual identities advance. Now more and more companies are designing programs with intersectionality in mind.

**IN:** A concept that is increasingly being addressed is cultural transformation. What does this mean to you, and how is Lenovo working to transform its culture?

**YC:** We have been transforming our culture since the very beginning. After we acquired IBM's PC Division, we began integrating East and West together to create a global company. Over the past 12 years, we have integrated all cultures, and this focus on diversity and inclusion has helped us grow from \$3 to \$45 billion. Diversity and inclusion enable our culture. They underpin our values of being customer focused, team players, entrepreneurs, and innovators. Diversity acts as the "what" in these values, while inclusion is the key to "how" we accomplish them. Inclusion lets employees bring their whole self to the workplace to really put those values into practice.

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

**YC:** Two of the hottest topics today are equity and creating a sense of

**"You can't have an inclusive culture if you don't have a strong stance against harassment."**

belonging. It started in health care and academia, but you'll see younger companies and tech companies talking about belonging. Belonging focuses on neuroscience research—the areas in the brain that feel physical pain are the same areas of the brain that are activated when we experience social exclusion. Being excluded hurts—and it shuts down the higher thinking that occurs in the prefrontal cortex, making you less productive. Unconscious bias factors into the idea of exclusion as well. That's why many companies are delivering unconscious bias training to build awareness.

**IN:** Given the change of emphasis in the current federal administration, will it be more incumbent on corporations in coming years to be at the vanguard leading the push for inclusion? Are companies well situated for that challenge, and why?

**YC:** Diversity and inclusion are competitive advantages, and as the world becomes flatter, it's even more imperative than ever to recognize and foster this. At Lenovo, we define diversity broadly. We value all those things that make one unique—nationality, cultures, language, skills, experiences, gender, etc. Inclusion accounts for all those differences and creates an environment where there is a sense of belonging, acceptance, and equality regardless of background or personal differences. Different perspectives and ideas are integral to developing diverse products that allow us to live in a smarter world.

**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 CEO or senior management team does not fully buy in that a culture of diversity and inclusion is a competitive advantage, how do you convince them?

**YC:** Benchmarking and sharing what is happening with competitors or world-class companies is a place to start. Also, leverage other data points such as employee engagement surveys to get direct feedback. Finally, prioritize areas of the organization that have the energy and willingness to embrace diversity and inclusion. **IN**



Conyers brings diversity and inclusion to center stage at the Women's Forum for the Economy and Society in Singapore in 2018.