

**BLACK LIVES MATTER:**  
MOVING BEYOND D&I

**THE COVID-19 SCAPEGOATING  
OF ASIAN AMERICANS**

**MENTAL HEALTH: TAKING  
CARE OF OUR TEAMS**

# INCLUSION

WINTER 2021  
+ ISSUE 6

*Creating Globally  
Inclusive & Culturally  
Competent  
Workplaces*

**CISCO'S**

Leading the Charge on Implementing  
Inclusive and Equitable Practices

**FRANCINE  
KATSOUDAS**







# Francine Katsoudas

## Executive Vice President & Chief People Officer, Cisco

**Francine Katsoudas, executive vice president and chief people officer of Cisco, is known for rallying people to bring about change that positively affects Cisco's people, business, and the world at large. Under her leadership, Cisco was named #1 on Fortune's World's Best Workplaces in 2019 and 2020. During her 24 years at Cisco, she has built conscious leaders and teams across the company. She is an advocate for human rights and an ally to underrepresented communities. She serves on the boards of AmeriCares, ADP, and Global Citizen. She shares her insights with Diversity Woman.**

**T**he year 2020 has not been easy. We have faced unimaginable adversity that has tested our resilience and strengthened our resolve.

The first week in January set the tone for how Cisco would navigate through the unexpected challenges ahead. Our CEO, Chuck Robbins, invited a small group of our African American/Black employees into his home for an honest conversation about race with our executive leadership team. Our employees talked; we listened. And learned. We gave ourselves 100 days to turn what we heard into action, including a worldwide, virtual talent expo for our African American/Black employees.

This experience also helped us see more clearly that when we focus on our people first, we can accelerate meaningful change in our company and our community. We remain grounded in our conscious culture and centered on our company



*Left, Katsoundas with fellow Cisconian, Tae Yoo, before Cisco's sleep out to support Covenant House; right, Katsoundas with her team at Cisco's sleep out to support Covenant House.*

purpose to power an inclusive future for all. We know that creating an environment where each of our 70,000-plus employees can thrive requires intention and commitment. So how do we work to accomplish this?

By giving frequent attention to ourselves and those around us, we can better understand our own needs, biases, and talents. We are active listeners of all perspectives and are aware of how we treat one another. We speak up when we notice anything that negatively impacts our experience or the experiences of our teammates.

By paying attention to ourselves and one another, we can see the strengths within all of us and harness them for the greater good. This creates an environment of belonging and an appreciation for the diverse backgrounds, experiences, beliefs, and ideas that make each of us special.

By asking our leaders to check in with their teams more often so our people feel cared for and connected to others; to find out what's going on in their lives and how they are coping with quarantine, social justice, natural disasters, family situations, and more.

All of this requires trust and transparency.

Step by step, we're having the tough conversations at the company level, removing the barriers that have prevented our people from stepping forward and eliminating obstacles that have slowed us down. We've realized that real, raw, honest stories are a big part of how to get proximate to the circumstances that affect our employees. As we talk openly with our

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teams about our business and people, macro-economic and social issues, and the day-to-day experiences our employees face, we bring both data and stories to the discussion.

This approach amplified as COVID-19 spread throughout the world, and we brought our employees together weekly to talk with our executive leadership team, medical and mental health experts, and one another. Company meetings moved from in-studio events to at-home conversations where we were seeing one another's personal spaces, meeting family members and pets, and talking about the content of our bookshelves as we shared business updates, answered medical questions, and checked in with our global team.

We acted on what we heard by increasing counseling sessions through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), increasing paid volunteer hours from 5 to 10 days, offering backup child care for working parents, and introducing a

new Students@Home initiative to support Cisco parents and caregivers. We implemented A Day for Me, where we give employees a day off to unplug and recharge anytime we sense our teams need it.

We made a \$225 million commitment to COVID-19 response in March, and in parallel, we established our crisis response program focused in four areas: the most vulnerable, families and community, research and resilience, and strategic recovery.

During this time, we became more resilient and more resolved. We felt ready to tackle any challenge, together. And then, George Floyd was murdered. We needed to reflect on what we'd learned, collect our courage, and take action.

We hosted heartfelt conversations at our company meeting about social injustice with our leadership team and guests such as Bryan Stevenson, founder of the Equal Justice Initiative; Darren Walker, president of the Ford Foundation; and Helen Zia, activist, author, and





Katsoudas and Michael Bush celebrate Cisco being named World's Best Workplace in 2019.

journalist. We expanded the dialogue that started the first week in January about how racism manifests in the workplace with under-represented communities who experience bias, racism, and hate.

These conversations weren't easy, and our employees' perspectives ranged widely. We worked to create an environment where everyone could share their thoughts openly to have a meaningful discussion. There were moments when strong opinions and emotions emerged, and we helped our teams through them. We provided a framework to guide the conversations and shared real examples of comments that were toxic and disrespectful, and offered alternative ways to express these thoughts in a productive way.

We also committed to make progress at Cisco and beyond with our Social Justice Beliefs and Our Commitment to Action. Some highlights include:

- ▶ **Increasing representation at all levels of the company.** We are working toward a 25 percent increase in representation of Black employees from entry level through manager level and a 75 percent increase in representation of Black employees from director to vice president and above by 2023, as well as pay parity and promotion fairness.
- ▶ **Investing in the pipeline and the next generation of Black technology leaders** by partnering with historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), focusing on sponsorship in both Cisco and our Cisco Networking Academies, and launching a \$50 million venture investment fund to help start-ups with diverse founders and leadership teams.
- ▶ **Driving societal change with a focus on innovation, human rights, and ethical principles** by advocating for policy reform such as national policing reform and providing employees with up to one business day of paid time off to vote.

Our social justice framework is a signal of where we're going as a company. It's built on our foundation of full spectrum of diversity—being inclusive of gender, ethnicity, race, orientation, age, ability, veteran status, religion, culture, background, experience, strengths, and perspectives—and on programs that drive action, such as the



Katsoudas at the 2019 Global Citizen Festival with (left to right) Chris Stadler, Hugh Evans, and Declan Kelly.

Multiplier Effect, diverse talent accelerators, blind hiring, talent expos, next-generation leader programs, and employee resource organizations.

Much of the action we've taken stems from our belief that every person should be seen, heard, and appreciated for who they are. This brings out the best in our people and empowers us to be creative, challenge norms that no longer serve us, and act on what we believe is right. We believe an inclusive future for all is possible and we embrace our part in making it happen. It has been intense work, and much of it has been driven by our people (HR) organization. We are so fortunate that we have a courageous executive leadership team led by Chuck Robbins, who is constantly challenging us to do more and drive impact.

When I joined our HR team many years ago, I knew I'd be driving change at the company. I didn't yet know the magnitude that HR could have as a driving force for social change across the world. Similar to how my organization is part of our company, our company is part of a global ecosystem of networked organizations. We know that one company can't do it alone, which is why we're partnering across the industry and geographies to address the biggest issues around the world.

These changes started with a story and a step. By listening to more stories and partnering to take more steps, we feel confident that together we can make a meaningful change in the world. **IN**