

BLACK LIVES MATTER:
MOVING BEYOND D&I

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

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

INCLUSION

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+ ISSUE 6

*Creating Globally
Inclusive & Culturally
Competent Workplaces*

LOWE'S

Janice Dupré Little

**Leading the Charge
on Implementing
Inclusive and
Equitable Practices**



Janice Dupré Little

**Executive Vice
President, Human
Resources
Lowe's Companies
Inc.**

As executive vice president, human resources, Janice Dupré Little is responsible for the global human resources strategy, practices, and operations that enable Lowe's to attract, motivate, develop, and retain outstanding associates. She joined Lowe's in 2017.

Dupré Little has 15 years of human resources and diversity and inclusion experience. Prior to her current role,

she was senior vice president, diversity and talent management, serving as chief diversity officer. She worked closely with leaders across the enterprise to expand and develop solutions that support Lowe's mission and core behaviors while making diversity and inclusion a signature priority for the company. She was also responsible for associate learning and development, leadership development, skilled trades education and workforce development, and Lowe's University. Before joining Lowe's, she served as vice president, diversity and inclusion, chief diversity officer, for McKesson Corporation.

Dupré Little earned a bachelor's degree in accounting and an MBA in finance and management from the University of Texas at Austin. She is an active member of the Executive Leadership Council, a board member of Disability:IN, and an advisory board member for Linkage's Women in Leadership Institute. In 2016 and 2018, she was named one of *Black Enterprise's* Top Executives in Corporate Diversity.

Inclusion: How has COVID-19 changed your perspective and your work?

Janice Dupré Little: While the pandemic has been a surprise to us all, I've long recognized the importance of an agile human resources team that prioritizes associates' well-being. That was our guiding light at the onset of the virus, and now, months later, it has remained our top priority.

We've been acutely aware that the pandemic has impacted our associates' lives in every way. From financial hardships due to

a spouse or partner losing a job to disruptions in child care making it challenging to function as we did prior to COVID, our associates have needed more support. We've recognized that and have worked to proactively address their needs by providing solutions like emergency paid leave and additional financial support, extending benefit offerings, and coaching leaders to regularly check in on how their associates are feeling.

What we've done is just good leadership and good business. We know if we take care of our people, they will take care of our customers and partners.

IN: This summer, as a result of Black Lives Matter protests focused on police reform, there has been increased attention on racial justice and equity in the workplace and in society in general. What is your company doing to advance change in the company or in the community, or both?

JDL: We are deeply saddened by the horrific murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and countless other Black people at the hands of police officers. Our president and CEO Marvin Ellison said it best in his letter to associates following the murder of George Floyd: "These times are when our character is tested and revealed and we will remain committed to fostering an environment where all individuals are safe, treated fairly, valued, and respected."

As a company, we've focused on helping our leaders and associates have authentic dialogue on sensitive subjects like racism. We hosted webinars and provided resource kits for leaders that included information, training, and coaching to help them understand racial tensions, support associates, and take a stand against racism and inequality. We also created a resource kit for associates so they too could be equipped with tools to support their fellow team members.

Our Black Business Resource Group hosted two Ask Me Anything sessions to foster open dialogue and understanding, and let associates ask the questions they may be afraid to ask anywhere else. In addition, our CEO held a

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special-edition town hall meeting where he discussed his personal experiences with racism and the company's stance on discrimination, inequality, and injustice, as well as the action steps we're going to take to address these systemic issues. We're also continuing with unconscious bias training for all associates so we're better able to recognize any biases and address them head-on.

This is all part of our multiyear culture, diversity, and inclusion strategy, which includes building a more diverse talent pipeline, fostering a more inclusive culture, providing more diverse services and solutions, and supporting and expanding access to our business resource groups, which are instrumental in initiating deep, honest conversations about issues affecting our associates and communities. We're also leveraging our partnership with the Executive Leadership Council to invest in the development of Black leaders at Lowe's.

In addition to its support of associates, Lowe's has committed more than \$100 million to support communities during the pandemic, including \$55 million in grants to provide much-needed financial relief to rural, minority-owned, and women-owned small businesses.

As important as these things are, we know that more action is required, and this is and will remain an ongoing process. Our entire executive leadership team is committed to keeping culture, diversity, and inclusion a top priority.

IN: Has the onset of COVID-19 and its impact on the economy made it more challenging to implement diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts?

JDL: We've had to adjust our approach as a result of COVID-19, but in some ways, these unforeseen challenges have given us new opportunities to implement our diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

Before COVID-19, many of our programs relied primarily on in-person interactions. Because of the pandemic, we've had to transition more of our events and trainings to online formats. Remote working and virtual events weren't something we did regularly in the past, but now that we've had some great experiences, we're seeing that we can leverage these technologies to expand the reach of a lot of our culture, diversity, and inclusion programs.

For example, since we've been able to record many of our streamed events, we can more readily share them with all of our associates, including those working in our stores and supply chain. The pandemic has also created an environment where people are seeking new ways to

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stay connected despite being distanced from each other. Our Business Resource Groups have been a great outlet for keeping our associates engaged through webinars, a regular newsletter, and other events like the Pride Circle #21DayAllyChallenge in celebration of our LGBTQIA+ associates and customers.

IN: Over the last few years there has been a great deal of excitement about artificial intelligence and machine learning in creating more inclusive workplaces. What do you see as the opportunities? How is your company or its clients using these technologies? What are some of the cautionary tales we need to be aware of?

JDL: There is a lot of potential for emerging technologies to disrupt all types of business-as-usual processes, and HR is no exception to that. We’ve started to explore ways that AI could be used to streamline hiring, improve employee retention, reduce bias, enhance inclusivity, and more. As we explore any new technology, such as AI-powered platforms, we partner with our Lowe’s Innovation Labs team to ensure we’re conducting robust testing and that the solutions being proposed will meet the current and future demands of our business. For example, that could mean digging deep into machine learning algorithms to ensure we’re not perpetuating bias that is baked into our data.

We’re still in the early stages of exploration, but it’s exciting to think about the possibilities for the future.

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?

JDL: I’m extremely passionate about creating a culture where everyone can be their authentic self and deliver their best at work. Even in my pre-HR career in accounting and finance, I was deeply involved in the people components of coaching, recruiting, and culture. My interest was always there—I just didn’t realize there was a formal job that focused on this until I came to understand what diversity and inclusion were all about back in the early 2000s. Now as the executive vice president of human resources for Lowe’s, I have the opportunity to define and evolve what it means to be a Lowe’s associate. It has been an incredible journey, yet at the same time, I recognize this is a great responsibility and one that I don’t take lightly. People have a lot of choices when it comes to where they want to work, and I want Lowe’s to be on the top of their list for many reasons. There is a lot that goes into building and sustaining an organizational culture that draws people in—it’s everything from benefits and rewards to business performance

and external reputation. What motivates me is the impact that we—as a company of 300,000-plus associates—can have. We can continue to be a collective force for good if we challenge ourselves.

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? Has COVID-19 made it more challenging?

JDL: A diverse workforce comprising people from various cultures, with different viewpoints and backgrounds, consistently outperforms a company that is not diverse and inclusive. More and more leaders are recognizing this, and so I believe there is now less of a need to “make a business case” for D&I and more of a need to deliver regular updates to senior leaders about the outcomes of these programs.

When effective D&I programs are in place, the numbers prove that they’re working. Top talent stays longer, engagement and productivity increase, and there is more internal talent mobility.

I do think that COVID-19 has overextended a lot of leaders and associates, leaving little time for them to focus on anything other than the work in front of them. This is why it is so important for D&I to be a natural part of how we conduct business. Here are a few examples of how to advance D&I during the pandemic.

Asians were on the receiving end of racist and disrespectful treatment because the virus originated in China. This is a clear example of bias and provides a great opportunity to increase unconscious bias training to help promote unity to mitigate racism.

We can support associates feeling isolated or depressed from working remotely by providing tips and benefits that promote better mental health.

The necessity of wearing a mask to support health during the pandemic has made many hard-of-hearing/lip-reading associates feel disconnected. Providing masks with clear mouth coverings or shields allows these associates to fully engage and communicate with others. **IN**