

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

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

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

INCLUSION

*Creating
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WINTER 2021 + ISSUE 6



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INCLUSION INSIGHTS

The Time to Address Racism Is Now

By LUIZA DREASHER

Systemic racism has been around for centuries. While, at first, religion was used to place cultural groups along a continuum from high to low, the 19th century introduced the notion that biology (e.g., skin color, hair



Addressing racial inequities in our organizations has long been hindered by the fact that race is one of those topics that is considered taboo.

texture) was a better way of justifying how individuals were treated. Social scientists have long rejected the notion that race is a biological reality. However, this does not mean many individuals aren't living it. The sad reality is that, to this date, being classified as Black, Asian, or Latinx does not carry the same benefits as being white. Whiteness has long been a synonym to privilege and opportunities, and this system of advantages and disadvantages will continue to be perpetuated if not acknowledged and addressed.

Addressing racial inequities in our organizations has long been hindered by the fact that race is one of those topics that is considered taboo. Many

of us don't even know how to start such conversations, so saying nothing seems to be our preferred default mode. The death of George Floyd, and of the many others we have witnessed, has left many employees walking around with all the pain and trauma associated with these senseless tragedies, yet unable to talk about them in an open manner.

More than ever, organizations need to create safe spaces so individuals can come together to share their experiences and concerns, discuss the events taking place in our society, and learn each other's perspective. In the article "Addressing Race and Racism in the Workplace," I outline several steps individuals can take so they lead conversations about race (or any other polarizing topic) in an effective manner. Among the steps are: (1) understanding that the process starts with self-awareness, (2) learning about the impact of our biases, (3) recognizing the role that power and privilege play in the conversation, and (4) learning about others and how they experience life.

For many employees, the sad reality is that their world is filled with pain, fear, and anxiety, which is compounded by our inability to address these feelings in meaningful conversations. This dynamic will most certainly impact productivity and engagement, as well as employees' well-being.

Having conversations about racism is, indeed, a challenging process. However, change will never come until we: (1) recognize that employees are carrying a lot of hurt with them, (2) gain a deeper understanding of the issues they are facing, (3) go through

the process of acquiring the necessary skills to start those conversations, and (4) find ways to advocate for a more equitable workplace and society. The steps outlined above should get you started on your personal journey of becoming an ally.

More than ever, we must take a strong antiracist stance. Dr. King once said, "The cry of Black power is about a reaction to the reluctance of white power to make the changes necessary to make justice a reality for the Negro."

Here is my challenge to you: how are you going to use your power toward creating a more just and equitable organization? **IN**

Luiza Dreasher is the president and CEO of Mastering Cultural Differences. She designs and implements customized programs for organizations that want team members to understand and work well across cultural differences. Her upcoming book, Mastering Cultural Differences: Strategies for Leading a Global Workforce, provides insight into differences impacting today's culturally diverse workplaces and identifies best practices for increased performance in a global economy.

To request a copy of the article "Addressing Race and Racism in the Workplace," contact the author at luiza@masteringculturaldifferences.com.



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Frontlines written by TAMARA E. HOLMES

THE
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It's About Time

Moving Beyond the June Supreme Court Ruling in Favor of LGBTQ Rights

On June 15, 2020, the US Supreme Court issued a landmark ruling stating that discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity is prohibited under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. This means that employers in the 28 states that did not already have protections in place can no longer fire an employee for identifying as LGBTQ.

While LGBTQ activists hailed the ruling, they also cautioned that there is still much work to be done for LGBTQ employees in the workplace to feel included and enjoy equal opportunities for advancement.

"The Supreme Court ruling is extremely important because it sets a new bar in terms of safety and security for LGBTQ employees," says Gabrielle Novacek, managing director and partner of Boston Consulting Group. "But there's a difference between knowing my employer can't fire me because I'm gay and knowing that I can be successful and thrive in an organization as a gay person. And that is where inclusion really starts to come into play."



implement new strategies like those below to create a more inclusive workforce that builds upon LGBTQ legal protections.

Take the focus off demographic outcomes. "By the time you take a look at your midlevel managers and realize there is a gap in representation, it's been multiple years that have

More work to be done

"Leading companies were already overcompensating for the lack of protections that existed before," says Jennifer Brown, a diversity and inclusion consultant and author of *How to Be an Inclusive Leader*.

The Corporate Equality Index of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Foundation highlights some of the ways employers have been pushing for inclusion for years, such as by offering LGBTQ-inclusive benefits and creating supplier diversity programs that give work to LGBTQ-owned enterprises.

At the same time, a 2018 report by the HRC Foundation found that nearly half of LGBTQ workers—46 percent—remain closeted at work.

Even those who aren't hiding their identity

completely may practice "covering," the act of minimizing a stigmatized identity, says Brown. "I could be LGBTQ and people know that I have a partner, but I could literally never talk about it. I could, in some groups of people, change the pronouns about my significant other. I could leave personal details out of the picture entirely, and that's covering," says Brown.

Opportunities for growth

That so many people remain closeted in the workplace speaks to a lack of proactive, overt public support for the LGBTQ community, a lack of funding for the community's issues and needs, and a lack of role models who have come out of the closet at the senior level, Brown says. But companies can

led you to that point," says Novacek. Instead, D&I professionals must use surveys, focus groups, and other methods to get input in real time about how comfortable LGBTQ employees are in bringing their full selves to work.

Provide more opportunities for mentorship. Look for opportunities to create one-on-one connection points between employees and senior leaders.

Enhance your corporate ombudsman program. When organizations step up their ombudsman programs and give employees a way to express concerns they don't feel comfortable sharing publicly, the employees feel heard and the employers know what steps they can take to meet those real concerns, Novacek says.



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Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Era of COVID-19

When the COVID-19 pandemic first hit, storm clouds seemed to be brewing over diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in the workplace. Between March and early June, job openings related to D&I fell at twice the rate of all job postings, according to research by employment website Glassdoor.

That's not entirely unexpected, says global consulting firm McKinsey & Company. In an article titled "Diversity Still Matters," McKinsey warned that with companies focusing on adapting to a remote workforce, finding new ways to interact with customers, and implementing other changes in response to the pandemic, D&I efforts may be pushed to the back burner.

Then, in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder by the police, as racial justice protests erupted across the country, D&I job openings rebounded 55 percent between June 8 and July 15.

Nevertheless, the pandemic and the accompanying recession are transforming the way D&I professionals must approach their jobs.

One of the best ways to ensure that D&I remains relevant throughout the pandemic and the current recession is to integrate D&I efforts into other company initiatives rather than thinking of them as a separate set of company



goals, says Terrence Underwood, senior director of Learning Products and Programs for Catalyst.

"For example, if you have a leadership workshop or a new-hire orientation, you can incorporate D&I into both of those initiatives," Underwood says. "It becomes something that is a part of our day-to-day strategy, our mission, our values, and when you think about it like that, then D&I should never go anywhere."

While the timetable for the pandemic's resolution is anyone's guess, here are three trends D&I professionals should keep on top of.

Remote working creates challenges—and opportunities. With people working remotely, companies must find new ways to make employees feel a sense of belonging though Zoom and other virtual communication applications. "People already had a tough time with being visible in the office. It's a lot easier to be invisible working remotely," says Tulsa, Oklahoma-based D&I consultant Risha Grant.

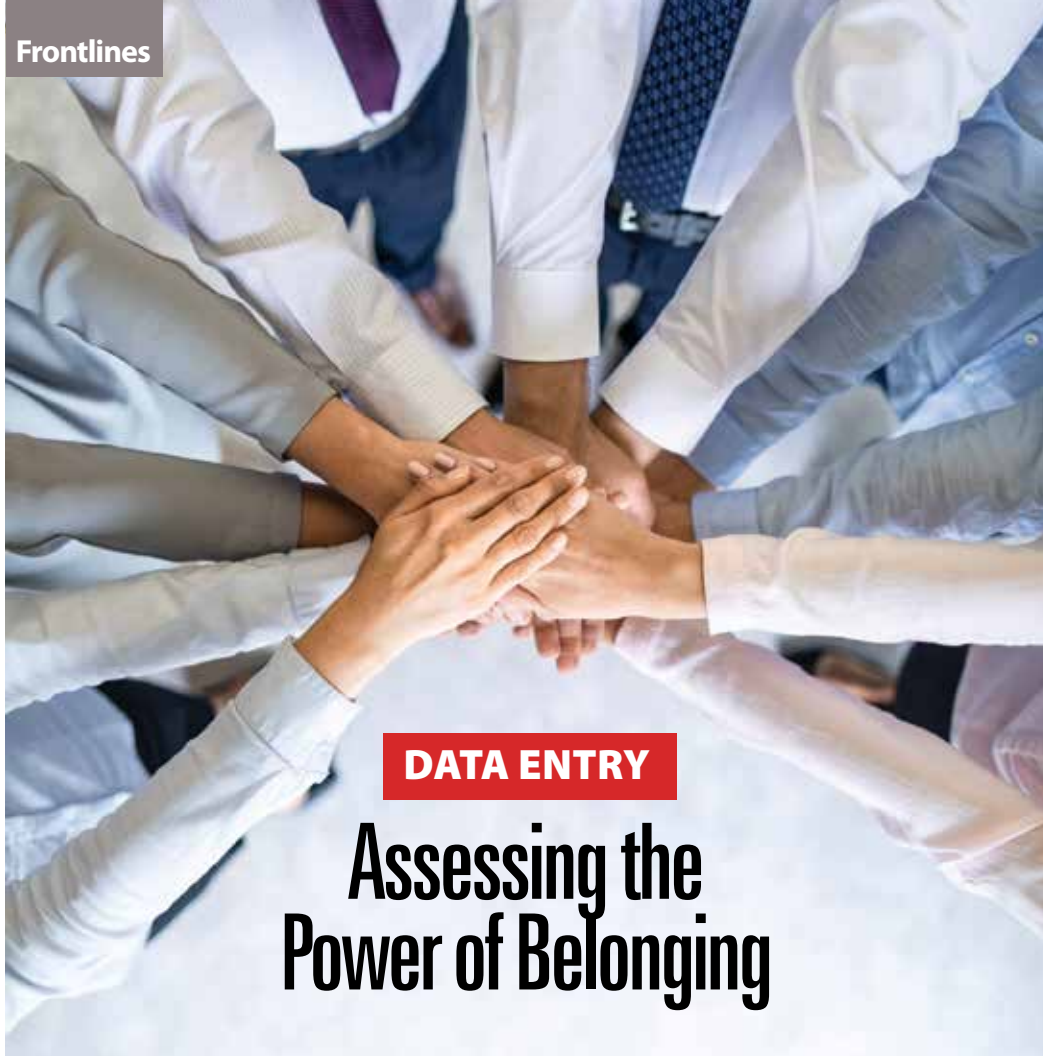
The reliance on videoconferencing can create new inequities. For example, "now people are being judged based on their living

arrangements," Grant says. "Some people don't have a nice home or something that's aesthetically pleasing behind them. Maybe they live with more people, so it's more difficult to have a professional atmosphere." Asking all employees to use virtual backgrounds is one way to address this.

On the flip side, the shift to remote working gives companies a unique opportunity to recruit diverse employees who may live outside their geographic area.

Minority workers may need more flexibility and resources. People of color are more likely to suffer severe health consequences of COVID-19, and they are more likely to experience financial hardship. D&I professionals must make sure workers have the support they need to handle family and community concerns related to the pandemic, and they need to recognize that the pandemic affects racial and ethnic groups differently.

Women may need additional support. The pandemic has created a child-care crisis, as some schools switch to virtual learning and some parents choose to keep their children home. Child care tends to fall disproportionately on working mothers, so new efforts will be needed to ensure that any gains women have made in the workplace don't get erased while a vaccine is being developed.



DATA ENTRY

Assessing the Power of Belonging

Cultivating a sense of belonging is as important for the workplace as it is the playground. In fact, belonging is a fundamental human need, reveals the New York–based think tank Coqual.

To prove this assertion, Coqual surveyed 3,711 professionals between the ages of 21 and 65 in February 2020 and another 627 in May 2020 to produce a report, *The Power of Belonging: What It Is and Why It Matters in Today's Workplace*.

Not only can belonging lead to more engagement in the workforce, but it can be a deterrent to high rates of turnover.

The recipe for belonging

To measure belonging in the

workplace, researchers came up with a scale from 0 to 10 that looked at four basic components.

- ▶ Whether employees feel seen at work for their unique contributions
- ▶ Whether employees feel connected to coworkers
- ▶ Whether employees feel supported in their daily work and career development
- ▶ Whether employees feel proud of their organization's purpose, vision, and values

The median belonging score was 7.4, but Asian women felt the least sense of belonging, scoring, on average, approximately 6.8 on the scale—slightly lower than Black women, who scored approximately 6.9.

On the other end of the belonging spectrum, white

men scored the highest, at 7.6, followed by white women at 7.5. Latinx women were somewhat in the middle, scoring approximately 7.4.

LGBTQ employees scored relatively high, with a median score of 7.5. One reason they may have felt a higher sense of belonging than some other groups is because they were more likely than their non-LGBTQ colleagues to talk about sensitive topics at work such as politics, sexism, and D&I issues.

Other factors can also influence one's sense of belonging. For example, parenthood, being an extrovert, and holding similar political views to colleagues are all associated with higher belonging scores.

"Talking about your kids is often a way to build trust

with colleagues and clients," says study researcher Julia Taylor Kennedy. "Nonparents don't have that point of connection with others."

Impact of belonging can be far-reaching

When asked if they were engaged at work, 97 percent of those who scored in the highest quartile of belonging scores said "yes," compared to 54 percent of those in the lowest. Also, 93 percent of those in the highest quartile said they were very loyal to their organization, compared to 35 percent of those in the lowest.

A sense of belonging can also be a deterrent to employee turnover, as 88 percent of those in the highest quartile said they intend to stay with their company for at least two years, compared to 61 percent of those in the lowest quartile.

Nearly half of those who scored in the lowest quartile—47 percent—said they felt "stalled" in their careers, compared to only 11 percent of those who scored in the highest quartile.

Creating a sense of belonging is something that everyone in an organization can contribute to, particularly if employees see senior leaders freely giving recognition to diverse employees.

As study researcher Pooja Jain-Link says, "We can all boost our colleagues' sense of belonging by providing timely and honest feedback, praise, and thanks for one another's contributions."

INCLUSIVE CORNER

The Importance of Providing Mental Health Services—Now

No one is immune to stress, but the pressures being brought by the travails of 2020 should put mental health services on the radar of every employer.

The average worker was experiencing 16 percent more stress in September than they were in February, before the pandemic, according to the June Mental Health Index, a monthly measure of the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the workforce.

The anxiety is unlikely to let up any time soon, and employees of color may be experiencing the brunt of the burden, due to the racial injustice protests and the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on people of color. For example, a study by the Center for Talent Innovation found that 2 percent of white employees had a family member die from COVID-19, but that was double for Asian employees (4 percent), and even higher for Latinx employees (8 percent) and

Black employees (11 percent).

Then, the shift to a largely remote workforce creates stresses of its own, says Aneesh Chaudhry, CEO of SoulPhysio Lifestyle, an Irvine, California-based wellness clinic that focuses on brain health.

“Parents have a significant amount of stress dealing with their children being home in addition to not being able to go into the office. There is also a strong lack of community and connection because of COVID-19,” Chaudhry says.

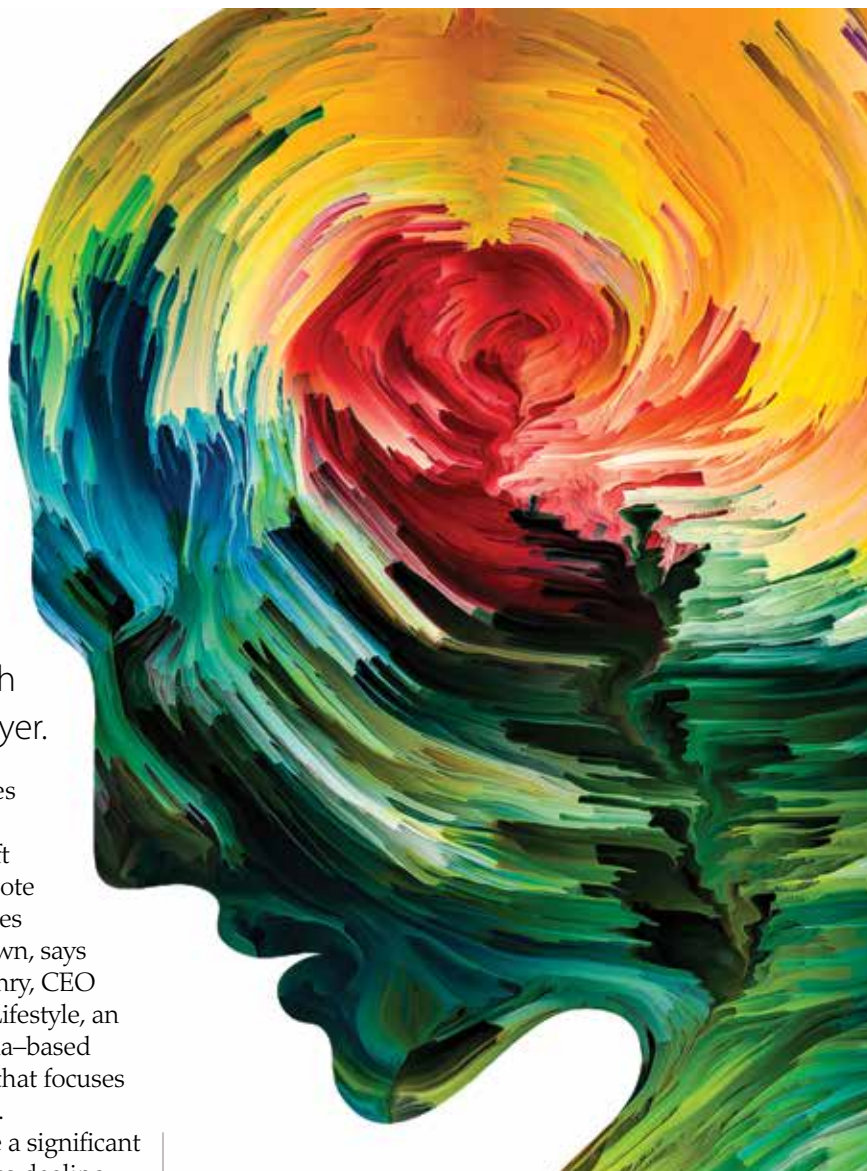
The National Safety Council, an organization that promotes health and safety in the home and workplace, offers the following actions employers can take to proactively address the

mental and emotional well-being of employees.

- ▶ Provide a confidential help line or email address where employees can ask for assistance anonymously.
- ▶ Share resources offered by benefits providers that can be accessed remotely such as Employee Assistance Programs, telehealth services, and crisis counseling.
- ▶ Provide information

on helpful community resources, such as child-care services and nursing care.

- ▶ Acknowledge challenges employees may be experiencing remotely, such as sharing workspace with other adults and helping children who are doing virtual learning.
- ▶ Conduct regular check-ins with employees to ask about their welfare.



Word Power

The use of carefully chosen words can have a powerful effect—as studies of hate speech and political ferment have shown. But words can also inspire us to greatness and to reach for, to paraphrase Abraham Lincoln, “our better angels.”

“We have a right to protest for what’s right. That’s all we can do. There are people hurting, there are people suffering, so we have an obligation, a mandate, to do something.”

— John Lewis, late civil rights leader and US representative (Georgia)

“Law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice, and when they fail in this purpose, they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress.”

— Martin Luther King Jr.

“We are going to go down swinging like Ella Fitzgerald, Muhammad Ali, in the name of love and justice. We are doing it for the whole world.”

— Dr. Cornel West, political activist, author, and professor of the Practice of Public Philosophy at Harvard University

“All our silences in the face of racist assault are acts of complicity.” — bell hooks, author and activist

“You are growing into consciousness, and my wish for you is that you feel no need to constrict yourself to make other people comfortable.”

— Ta-Nehisi Coates, writer

“Black Lives Matter ... offers a new vision for young Black girls around the world that we deserve to be fought for, that we deserve to call on local governments to show up for us.”

— Patrisse Cullors, artist and organizer, cofounder of Black Lives Matter

“Equal rights, fair play, justice, are all like the air: we all have it, or none of us has it. That is the truth of it.”

— Maya Angelou

“No, I will not.”

— Rosa Parks

“When we identify where our privilege intersects with somebody else’s oppression, we’ll find our opportunities to make real change.”

— Ijeoma Oluo, Nigerian American writer

“In our era, it is not enough to be tolerant. You tolerate mosquitoes in the summer, a rattle in an engine, the gray slush that collects at the crosswalk in winter. You tolerate what you would rather not have to deal with and wish would go away. It is no honor to be tolerated. Every spiritual tradition says love your neighbor as yourself, not tolerate them.”

— Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*

“Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope.”

— Robert F. Kennedy

“Anti-Black racism is not only happening in the United States. It’s actually happening all across the globe. And what we need now, more than ever, is a human rights movement that challenges systemic racism in every single context.”

— Opal Tometi, human rights activist, cofounder of Black Lives Matter

“We have fought for America with all her imperfections, not so much for what she is, but for what we know she can be.”

— Mary McLeod Bethune, educator, civil rights activist, and special adviser to President Franklin D. Roosevelt

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INCLUSION INSIDER

One Size Does Not Fit All

To build sustainable D&I, include women of color

BY RUCHIKA TULSHYAN

A few years into my corporate career in the United States, I realized that my trajectory as a woman of color looked different from that of other women around me. My managers expected me to be a hard worker, but not to have an opinion or



“It’s necessary to build systems where everyone benefits from corporate diversity efforts.”

demonstrate leadership skills. White women seemed to be navigating their own challenges, to be sure, but I often noticed that they didn’t face the same backlash when they spoke their minds or advocated for themselves. I saw many advance even when they put in less work than I did.

Years later, as more research—finally!—emerges on the professional disparities between white women and women of color, it has become undeniable that one size does not fit all.

This fact is especially key for organizations seeking to prioritize women’s advancement. If a leader wants to make sustainable changes toward gender equity, the intersection between race and gender—how women of color navigate the

organization based on their race and gender—must be considered in all corporate diversity efforts. While much ink has been spilled, and rightly so, over the paltry representation of women in the C-suite, a shockingly low number of those positions are held by women of color—4 percent compared with 19 percent of white women.

So, how do you begin to take an intersectional approach to diversity and inclusion?

Start by collecting data on how women of color experience your workplace, and compare it with the data on the experiences of both white men and white women. When you don’t disaggregate the data by race and gender, you often only end up understanding how the largest majority of women in your organization—white women—are faring. If you make decisions based on that data—for example, organize a corporate initiative around teaching women employees to negotiate—you risk alienating women of color, who are likely to be judged more negatively for speaking up.

While we’re on the topic of data, ensure you disaggregate pay data by race and gender, too. Many organizations seeking pay equity often neglect this, thereby capturing incomplete data. Statistically, women of color—especially Latinx, Black, and Indigenous women—experience the largest pay gap when the data control for all factors. The gap continues to go unaddressed when we only draw from the data comparing white women and white men.

As more companies embark on diversity training efforts, ensure that all learning on the topic is framed with an intersectional approach. I’ve been asked to speak to some organizations about the gender equity gap, but explicitly asked not to address race in my presentation. I’ve swiftly declined those opportunities. To create lasting strategic and personal behavioral shifts from D&I training, it’s necessary to understand the systemic barriers faced by people of color, especially women of color, then make changes.

Most importantly, lead from the framework of equity that centers and supports the most marginalized voices in the room. It’s especially critical for our white women allies to step up when they see women of color experiencing discrimination. If only white women are benefiting from the changes in your organization, you risk creating a different type of opportunity gap. It’s necessary to build systems where everyone benefits from corporate diversity efforts—not just the privileged. We can only win when all of us have the same opportunity to advance. **IN**

Ruchika Tulshyan is the founder of Candour, an inclusion strategy firm. She is working on a forthcoming book about inclusion and women of color in the workplace (MIT Press, 2022).





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THE BLAME GAME

The coronavirus pandemic unleashed an outburst of hate, harassment, and discrimination against Asian Americans

BY JACKIE KRENTZMAN

When San Francisco State Asian American Studies professor Russell Jeung first heard that the coronavirus that originated in China had reached the United States, he knew it was time to roll up his sleeves.

Jeung, who tracks incidents of harassment, discrimination, and hate crimes against Asian Americans, knew that they would be blamed and demonized for bringing COVID-19 into the United States. Ever since

large groups of Chinese and other Asians came to the United States for the California gold rush in the middle of the 19th century, white Americans have warned of the “yellow peril,” which centered around the belief that Asians carried diseases. In the 18th century, it was smallpox; in the 19th century, bubonic plague. These false stereotypes triggered one of the most racist acts passed by the United States government, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the first time a specific ethnic group was barred from immigrating to the United States.

“When I first heard about this pandemic coming from China, I knew that we would get scapegoated for this,” says Jeung. “In the past, we have been excluded, quarantined, detained, and reported. So I knew that it was important to begin documenting these kinds of incidents.”

Jeung, in partnership with the STOP AAPI (Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders) Hate Reporting Center, developed a tracking system and website designed to collect data about discrimination, harassment, and hate crimes that have spread with

“When I first heard about this pandemic coming from China, I knew that we would get scapegoated for this. In the past, we have been excluded, quarantined, detained, and reported.”

— Russell Jeung, Asian American Studies professor, San Francisco State

COVID-19. In the first month alone, the center received more than 1,500 firsthand accounts of incidents from 45 states such as verbal assaults, racial slurs, shunning, discrimination, civil rights violations, and outright attacks. From March 19 to October 7, 2020, the number of reported incidents stood at 2,738. More than 70 percent were verbal harassment; 9 percent were physical attacks.

The examples gathered were varied. An Asian American would cough at work and be told to go see a doctor. Others were spat upon or told not to enter a store. A woman reported being sprayed with Lysol at a pharmacy. Many reported racial slurs, profanities, and name calling.

While the number of cases reported in the workplace (38 percent of cases were reported in businesses, but places of employment were not separated out from other businesses) are likely depressed due to so many people working from home, companies across the United States began campaigns to educate people and ensure such incidents of hate did not occur in their workplace.

One such organization was Ascend, a 15-year-old advocacy organization that supports Pan-Asian professionals in the workplace realizing their full potential through leadership development. Anna Mok, Ascend’s CEO, says the organization immediately began educating companies about some of the challenges Pan-Asians (Ascend’s preferred term for Asian Americans)

face in the workplace, especially around the new sets of stereotypes and fears generated by COVID-19. For example, it hosted a series of (virtual) town halls with chief diversity officers to give them the resources and tools

they need to create safe spaces for their Asian American employees and create productive dialogues around the challenges for Asian Americans in society and the workplace.

One of those tools was a multi-pronged COVID-19 resource guide. Its purpose is to promote the health and wellness, safety, and economic security of employees and their families, as well as to help managers and employees combat bias, discrimination, and harassment by proactively addressing misinformation in the



How to Be an Ally

A recent Harris Poll revealed that 75 percent of Asian Americans are concerned about hate crimes and discrimination related to the coronavirus pandemic. If you are a manager at a company, or witness an Asian American colleague, neighbor, or friend being harassed in public, here are some proactive steps you can take.

- ▶ Circulate a statement in your company that firmly states all communications must be nonracist and that the company will not tolerate demeaning jokes or insensitive taunts.
- ▶ “Words matter,” says Russell Jeung, San Francisco State Asian American Studies professor. “For example, after the 9/11 attack, President [George W.] Bush strongly denounced all forms of racism against the Muslim American community. Today, our federal government is not only not doing that, but they are using incendiary language that perpetuates and even promotes more hate crimes against Asian Americans.”
- ▶ Encourage all employee affinity groups to participate in Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month (May) to learn about the many different Asian and Asian American cultures and the history of the xenophobia they have faced. This can also be an opportunity to learn about the history of Asian American resistance to different forms of xenophobia.
- ▶ Promote events and workshops that support empathy and build allyship. Bring in a facilitator to lead a meeting on bystander intervention—what to do when you witness harassment without putting yourself in danger.
- ▶ Put up signage that sends the message to treat everyone with respect. Schools can add to their antibullying curriculum language and activities that denounce harassment of Asian Americans.

Contributions and Challenges

Ascend has assembled data with insights unique to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI).

Pan-Asians are at greater risk of being laid off in a downturn due to bias in talent decisions that negatively impact AAPI individual contributors and middle-management talent.

(Ascend)

AAPIs make up 17 percent of doctors, 9 percent of physician assistants, and 10 percent of nurses in the United States.

(Association of American Medical Colleges and Minority Nurse)

AAPIs represent 5 percent of all COVID-19 deaths with a known race/ethnicity in the United States.

(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

workplace and to speak up to protect employees of Pan-Asian descent.

Ascend also put out a joint message with more than a hundred corporations and partner organizations denouncing discrimination against and scapegoating of Asians and other groups. It reads, in part: “Heeding historical precedents for scapegoating marginalized groups for diseases and economic instability, our organizations are working together to combat anti-Asian stigma and all forms of bias based on age, color, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, and veteran status.”

Ascend also released a five-point Action Agenda to promote inclusion, raise awareness on the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups, denounce bias against Pan-Asians and others, support communities and frontline workers, and raise funds to support vulnerable populations impacted by COVID-19.

Mok emphasized that while some of the egregious acts of xenophobia, such as the physical assaults on Asian-Americans, grab the headlines, there are many instances of microaggressions and unconscious bias that are harmful as well.

“We are educating companies how COVID-19 and the backlash are impacting their Asian American employees,” she says. “For example, we have lots of Asian Americans who are on the medical frontlines of

COVID—over 20 percent of those in the medical and health field are Asian Americans—and they are bringing that stress back home with them. We have lots of Asian Americans living in multigenerational households [making it harder to keep COVID from spreading]. So we are working with CDOs to help them understand the complexity and nuances of the issues and the unique ways COVID-19 has impacted their employee work base and their well-being.”

A good example of a proactive company is Cooley Law, a global law firm based in Palo Alto with over 2,500 staffers (20 percent Asian American). It quickly geared up to support its Asian American workforce, says Amie Santos, director of diversity and inclusion. She brought in Professor Jeung (virtually) to talk to over 600 staff members about the roots of Asian xenophobia in the United States, its prevalence over the years, its latest version engendered by COVID-19, and how the media and some lawmakers perpetuate stereotypes and sow misinformation.

The event was put on during Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. To drive home the emotional impact harassment and discrimination can have, Cooley decided that, instead of presenting

statistics or citing examples, it would be more powerful to have members of the Asian Pacific Islander Heritage Affinity Group read the first-person accounts of people who have experienced a backlash because of their ethnicity, many of them horrifying and graphic.

“We have a number of employees who have been discriminated against or had friends who were, and our CEO made this a top personal priority,” says Santos. “That support from the top makes a big difference.”

Santos said that her team made sure to build on this presentation by scheduling brown bag lunches on topics such as how to be an ally and what to do and say if witnessing an act of discrimination.

Another example of a company stepping up to support its Asian American employees is Uber. Bo Young Lee, its first-ever chief diversity officer, said that since the outbreak of COVID-19 in the United States, she has not only heard firsthand accounts from colleagues, friends, and family, but she has also personally experienced harassment, including racial profiling, shunning and avoidance in public, and name calling.

“Pretty much every Asian American has experienced some form of this racism,” she says. “The most victimized are those who are East Asian or of East Asian descent. And the current administration has made matters

For Pan-Asians, cultural and other barriers are likely to limit access to mental health support and services.

(Asian American Psychological Association)

Pan-Asians represent the highest percentage (29 percent) of multigenerational households.

(Pew Research)

Over two million AAPIs work in health care, transportation, and service industries and are subjected to xenophobia in the workplace in addition to increased exposure to communicable diseases.

(Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance)

First-generation Pan-Asian Americans are typically not as accustomed to or prepared for harassment in and outside the workplace and place high value in the “American dream.”

(Ascend)

For working-age Pan-Asians, the pressure to maintain job security is magnified because this group financially supports extended family.

(Prudential Financial Report)

worse with its vilification of Chinese by calling COVID-19 the Chinese Virus, Kung Flu, and other such names.”

Lee says that this upsurge in bias and harassment is a reminder that Asian Americans are still seen as foreigners in this country, even

many more Americans since the May murder of George Floyd by police, have compelled companies to launch multipronged campaigns in support of all employees of color.

promoted into leadership roles, and can lead both to a form of “othering,” in which coworkers can resent Asian Americans, and to a rise in racial profiling, stereotyping, and stalled careers.

Further, this myth can be internalized, says Lee, and lead to fear of asking for support in a time of crisis, like today.

“In the United States, the squeaky wheel gets the grease,” says Lee. “To the extent that Asian Americans have internalized this stereotype, if Asian Americans are afraid to speak up and say ‘I was harassed,’ they won’t get the support they need, and that stereotype can continue to perpetuate.”

Finally, says Lee, the key is to remember we are all human beings.

“The average employees can’t write a new policy or enforce your antihate policy, but they can create a space where they can listen,” she says. “Those of us privileged to be in a better mental state can lend that privilege to other people. If you want to help, you can simply reach out to folks on your team who may be struggling, and check in. Asking, ‘How are you doing, really?’ then listening is a more powerful act than people recognize.” **IN**

“This upsurge in bias and harassment is a reminder that Asian Americans are still seen as foreigners in this country, even if their family has been here for generations.”

if their family has been here for generations.

Uber, says Lee, has offered various forms of support to its employees, including presentations for and by its Asian-American Resource Group, assistance for those who have family members with COVID-19 (which disproportionately impacts the Asian American community), and a billboard, email, and in-app messaging campaign, “If you tolerate racism, delete Uber.”

This campaign is an example of how the confluence of COVID-19 and the racial health gap it has exposed, along with the embrace of the Black Lives Matter movement by

“I hope this experience of increased racial harassment that is a by-product of COVID-19 encourages Asian Americans to be advocates not only for our community, but for all communities—that we become better allies to the Black community, for instance,” says Lee. “All of us should fundamentally get and support the Black Lives Matter movement.”

Another concern for Asian American leaders is the myth, which is certainly not new, that Asians in the United States are the “model minority.” This myth, based on the stereotype of Asians as hard workers who do not complain and are quiet and docile, has kept them from getting



BY CAROLYN M. BROWN

The phrase “Black Lives Matter” has become a rallying cry against systemic racism, anti-Blackness, and police brutality. After the murder of George Floyd at the hands of police on May 25, protests and civil unrest that began in Minneapolis spread in cities across the United States as tens of thousands of people swarmed the streets to express outrage and grief. According to news reports, protests erupted in more than 2,000 cities and



\$1.254 ▲ +120.85 • \$534 ▼ -5.12 • \$128 ▼ -5.12 • \$944 ▲ +20.85

MAKING BLACK LIVES MATTER TO CORPORATE AMERICA

Companies are moving beyond diversity and inclusion to take steps toward racial justice and equity initiatives

towns across 60 countries in support of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. BLM street murals appeared in cities around the country and the world.

Although the National Guard was activated in at least 21 states to deal with rioting, looting, and acts of violence, the vast majority of BLM protests—more than 93 percent—have been peaceful, according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, which analyzed over 7,750 BLM demonstrations in all 50 states and Washington, DC, taking place between May 26 and August 22. By mid-summer, between 15 and 26 million people had participated at some point in the demonstrations,

ALL PHOTOS FROM UNSPLASH

making the protests the largest in US history, reports the *New York Times*.

In the wake of the BLM protests after May 25, hundreds of companies have blanketed social media with statements denouncing discrimination and, for the first time, vowing to stand with BLM and professing their commitment to combat racial injustice. Jack Dorsey, CEO of Twitter and Square, declared Juneteenth (June 19), which commemorates the end of slavery, as a paid corporate holiday. At a protest, JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon took a knee with staff at one of the bank's branches, adopting

sweeping legislative changes such as the BREATHE Act, which addresses policing, pretrial detention, sentencing, and prosecution practices that BLM cofounder Patrisse Cullors said have long disproportionately criminalized Black and Brown communities, LGBTQIA+ people, Indigenous people, and individuals with disabilities.

While some people see the BLM movement as focused on "defunding the police," just one plank of the movement is about divesting taxpayer dollars from policing and reinvesting

playing out in our streets—more recently in response to acts of racism and violence that took the lives of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, and consequent rallies and uprisings—diversity and inclusion is a different movement happening in the halls of Corporate America that focuses on representation, says Yvonne Hutchinson, CEO and founder of Ready Set, a boutique consulting firm in the San Francisco Bay Area. However, "if I were to apply a racial justice or antiracist lens



the controversial symbolic move of former quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who remains blacklisted from the NFL for calling attention to police killings of Blacks.

#BlackLivesMatter has mushroomed from a hashtag and online community, created in 2013 after the acquittal of George Zimmerman for fatally shooting 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, to a national mobilized network of affiliate chapters that emerged in response to the police shooting death of 18-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. BLM organizers have called for

them in alternative approaches, such as establishing a Community Public Safety Office. In reality, BLM is the new civil rights movement—it is a new chapter in the longstanding struggle for freedom and human rights that dates back to the arrival of the first slave ships in America, the Emancipation Proclamation, the civil rights movement that ended Jim Crow laws, and the Black Power Movement, which emphasized police brutality as well as Black pride, political power, and economic clout.

Whereas Black Lives Matter is an antiracist, racial justice movement

to Corporate America, I would be looking at several difference factors, including representation and allocations of power within organizations from the bottom up, from the most entry level to senior leadership to the C-suite to the board," she says.

How companies impact Black communities is yet another factor. "It's also a question of product services and external engagement and whether or not that has net positive or net negative impact on Black folks," adds Hutchinson, who specializes in diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace. Her firm provides training on bias

in systems and not just individual unconscious bias.

Recent events have led some corporate executives to take the step of looking beyond diversity and inclusion practices in their workplace and toward addressing race relations and systemic racism in the communities they serve and where they do business. This includes an influx of donations made to civil rights and social justice organizations. For example, Verizon committed \$10 million to aid organizations dedicated to equality and social justice. Walmart pledged to commit \$100 million over five years to create a new center for racial equality. Apple pledged \$100 million for a new Racial Equality and Justice Initiative. Bank of America promised

Color of Change President Rashad Robinson told *USA Today*. “I want them to actually make Black lives matter through their policies and their practices.”

At the heart of skepticism about recent pledges and declarations is Corporate America’s track record of inequalities in hiring, paying, and



White House gave notice that federal workplaces would no longer be allowed to conduct training that focuses on race theory and white privilege. The executive order also banned contractors, subcontractors, and grantees from offering diversity training on racial and gender biases.

The impact has rippled through Corporate America, reports the *New York Times*. Microsoft said the Labor Department has initiated an investigation into its June commitment to double the number of Black managers and senior employees by 2025 as a violation of civil rights laws. With the lack of support at the federal level, chief diversity officers have an additional challenge executing diversity, inclusion, and equity initiatives.



to spend \$1 billion over the next four years to address “economic and racial inequality accelerated by a global pandemic.”

In perhaps the biggest gesture, JPMorgan Chase said it is committing \$30 billion over five years to help Black and Latinx Americans develop wealth, buy homes, and grow businesses. In a released statement, Dimon said “systemic racism is a tragic part of America’s history. We can do more and do better to break down systems that have propagated racism and widespread economic inequality.”

Taking action beyond statements and pledges

Often citing lack of action, and sometimes even hostility, from the federal government on closing disparities, racial justice organizations want corporations to do more. Online racial justice organization Color of Change has launched a campaign urging corporations, including Amazon, Nike, and Target, to move #BeyondTheStatement. “I have seen an outpouring of companies saying Black lives matter,”

promoting Black employees and fostering toxic workplace cultures. Senior leadership remains predominantly white men. As of 2018, Apple reportedly had one Black executive out of a total of 123, and 284 Black managers out of 9,878, while 9 percent of its total US workforce is Black. Just 4 percent of JPMorgan Chase’s top executives are Black. The Fortune 500 has just four Black CEOs.

Of the 3,000 largest publicly traded companies, Black board directors make up just 4 percent of the total, up from 3 percent in 2015, according to analysis by the Institutional Shareholder Services’ ESG division. In support of BLM and recent protests, Reddit founder Alexis Ohanian, who is married to tennis great Serena Williams, resigned from the board to make room for a Black director. Reddit has since appointed its first-ever Black member, Michael Seibel, CEO of Y Combinator, which funds early-stage start-ups.

Complicating matters is the Trump administration’s vow to put an end to diversity training, which it has deemed “un-American.” In September, the

Moving from allyship to collaborative solidarity

Ready Set has been advancing the framework of active allyship. “A lot of people are calling themselves allies but they’re not meeting the needs of impacted people of color,” Hutchinson says. “We don’t need allies. We need accomplices, people who understand that to really support communities of color and other marginalized communities, they have to be active. Being an accomplice embraces the idea that there may be some risk involved.”

D&I strategists believe Corporate America’s willingness to speak out against systemic racism has as much to do with Amy Cooper as a reaction to George Floyd’s murder on May 25. Cooper is a white woman who called the police saying a Black man was threatening her. In actuality, bird-watcher Christian Cooper had asked that she leash her dog in accordance with the rules for that section of New York’s Central Park. A video of the incident went viral on May 26, and Cooper became the face of Corporate America in that moment. She was

fired from her job as head of insurance investment at the global asset management firm Franklin Templeton, reflecting a zero-tolerance policy.

"Amy Cooper is in every organization, agency, and work environment," Courtnee Carrigan, CEO and executive trainer of the Raising the Bar Performance Group, told *Columbus CEO* magazine. "These are Amy Coopers who have stopped Black and Brown people from getting promotions. So, if our white corporate establishments want to do some antiracist work, create an antiracist culture where that is not going to be tolerated and start to look at what policies you can have that protect Black and Brown employees from the Amy Coopers," said Carrigan.

As a Pew study revealed, 74 percent of Black people say that race is core to their identity, while 59 percent of Latinos and 56 percent of Asian Americans felt the same. In comparison, only 15 percent of white people say that race is core to their identity. While race identity is a social construct, there can be no justice unless white people rec-



Roundtable, "Standing on the sidelines of racial and social justice is not an option. We remain committed to full inclusion and will continue to transparently share data to hold ourselves accountable and drive real change. Intel is also proud to advocate for public policy and legislative solutions that combat systemic inequality."

It is really about the "evolution of our actions," says Elle Hearn, transgender rights activist, executive director, and founder of the Marsha P. Johnson Institute. Meaning, "our actions six years ago shouldn't be the same today. Women need to be in solidarity with each other," adds Hearn, noting that Black trans women like Marsha P. Johnson were

Before May 25, corporations were calling on consulting firms for diversity and inclusion outreach. Now they're getting calls about race relations and allies skills training. People in Corporate America are now talking about racism, antiracism, and white supremacy, notes Mary-Frances Winters, founder and president of The Winters Group, Inc., an organization-development and diversity-consulting firm. "When people hear the word white supremacy, they think we're talking about the KKK or neo-Nazis. White supremacy is an ideology, one that this society is founded off," Winters said as the opening keynote speaker for the Diversity Woman 2020 Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging Conference.

She went on to say, "It shows up every single day in our organizations, in our practices and policies. We won't be able to move further along in our conversation if white people aren't willing to acknowledge their whiteness and white privilege." Winters added that white people need to stop saying "I don't see race, I see people."

ognize that everybody in the human race is not treated equitably, Winters explained.

All of us carry some aspects of privilege, acknowledges Dr. Khyati Joshi, director of the Institute for Teaching Diversity and Social Justice and a professor at Fairleigh Dickinson University. "We can talk about education, classism, heterosexism, sexism, ableism, ageism, and who has the advantage or disadvantage," she says. She further points out there is a fundamental distinction between nonracism and antiracism. With the former, "you're just neutral, you are not a racist," she explains. The latter is active, "you're dismantling racism."

Business Roundtable CEOs recently announced new corporate initiatives and policy recommendations aimed at addressing racial equity in employment, finance, health, housing, and criminal justice. Intel CEO Bob Swan, who pledged \$1 million in support of efforts to address social injustice and antiracism across various nonprofits and community organizations, said in a statement released by Business

in the forefront of the LGBT rights and civil rights movements.

"Women working in Corporate America who have access to power must forge relationships where that power can be leveraged. Not just a one-time trade-off, but in practice," Hearn says. "Our working-class women, who are targets of anti-racism in America, are not always lifted up."

Collaborative Solidarity is a framework she created back in 2015 for the Black Lives Matter Global Network, where she served as a strategic partner and organizing coordinator. "It goes beyond diversity and inclusion," she explains. "It is a guide as to how we can pursue our liberation as Black people, building community and camaraderie across very different lived experiences and identities. Corporate America has to be willing to take more risks because so much more is at risk at this time." *IN*

Carolyn M. Brown is an award-winning journalist, author, playwright, and the founder of True Color Project.

FRESH TAKE

Crisis as a Platform for Social Change

BY DR. SHELTON J. GOODE

For 8 minutes and 46 seconds, George Floyd was pinned down with a knee on his neck and unable to breathe. While far from being its only manifestation, this is what racism looks like. It seems we



barely have time to grieve one death before another is captured on cell phone video.

Protests have erupted throughout the nation demanding

justice and an end to police brutality in response to the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Rayshard Brooks, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so many others who human decency and the rule of law have failed. Dealing honestly and effectively with racism remains America's unfinished business.

While protest has proven to be a critical driver of change, it's not the only one. Now, more than ever, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) professionals need to be a force for change and education. Our clients, communities, and country have been

"I believe the DEI community can form partnerships with social justice thought leaders to create forums and programs focused on antiracism awareness."

deeply affected by recent events, but the DEI community needs to be more determined than ever to help drive the necessary changes.

We extend our sincere condolences to the families of those most recently impacted by racial violence, but we owe these martyrs more. As Dr. King's words remind us, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." The entire DEI profession must redouble our efforts at this moment to forge a more humane and just society.

I believe there are three measurable and sustainable actions we can take. First, let's call for national legislation aimed at ending racial violence and increasing police accountability. Next, I believe the DEI community can form partnerships with social justice thought leaders to create forums and programs focused on antiracism awareness. Lastly, we can call on our business, academic, civic, faith, and philanthropic allies to join with us in

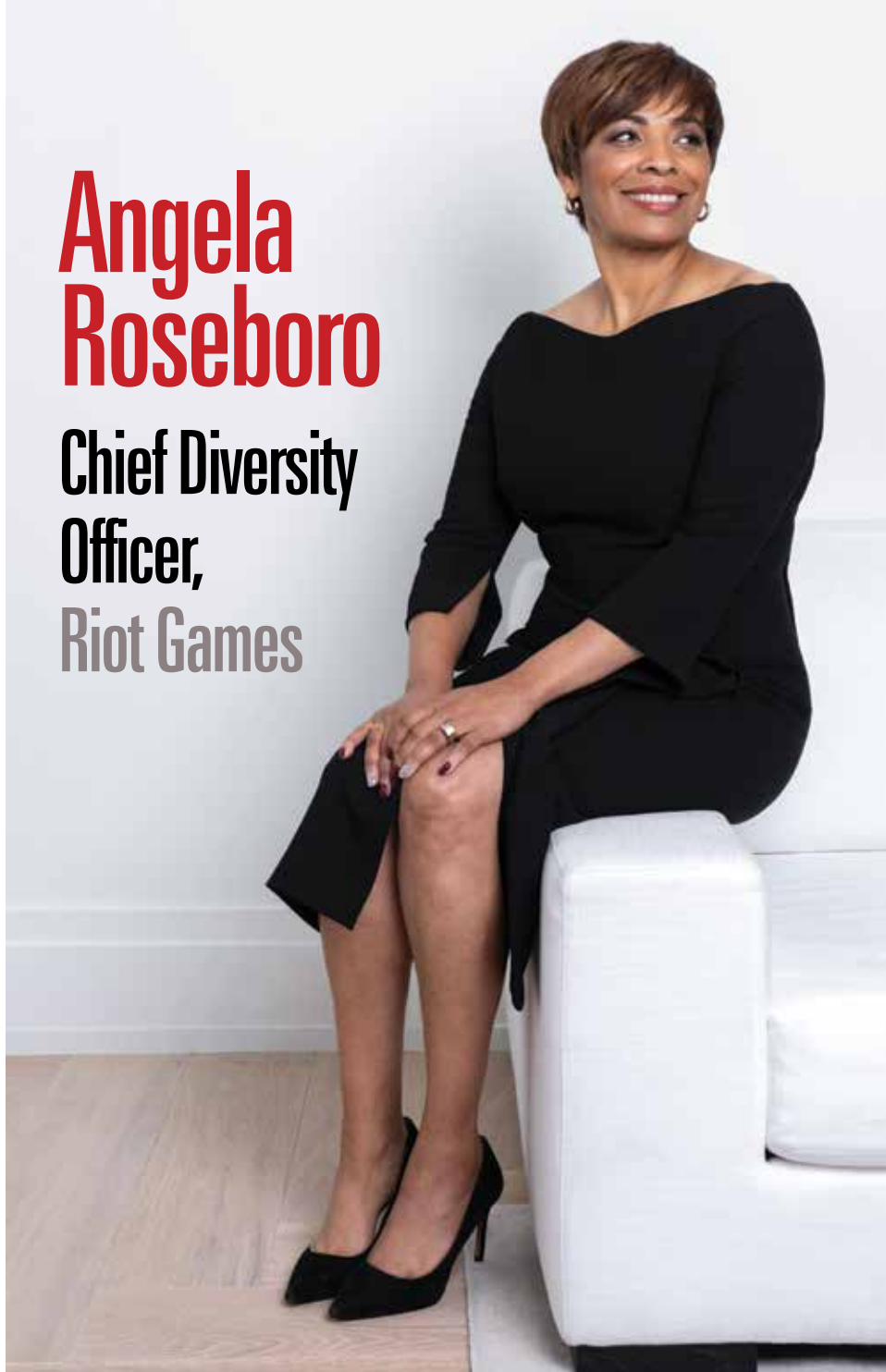
committing to the painful, long-term work of improving racial equity and ensuring greater accountability for equity and justice.

It may be unrealistic to think in terms of a "solution" to racism, but I believe the DEI community can work diligently, urgently, and successfully in assessing and reforming the current state of affairs. Diversity is a reality in America today. Whether we allow diversity to drain our companies, communities, and country or serve as a dynamic catalyst to prosperity is both a choice and a challenge. Personally, I believe that our country's diversity is its greatest asset and best hope for the future. It is a lighthouse that will give us the insights and perspectives needed to navigate through the storm of simmering tensions—and find creative solutions for achieving a more inclusive America. **IN**

Dr. Shelton J. Goode is the CEO and president of Icarus Consulting. Forbes named him one of the top 10 D&I Trailblazers. Dr. Goode earned his doctorate in public administration from the University of Alabama. He is the author of Crisis as a Platform for Social Change from Strawberry Mansion to Silicon Valley. Dr. Goode works and lives in the Atlanta area.

Angela Roseboro

Chief Diversity Officer,
Riot Games



“To make progress, we need a new playbook. New thinking is even more relevant now.”

As chief diversity officer for Riot Games, Angela Roseboro develops and implements initiatives to drive inclusion and cultural growth. She manages all activity relating to diversity and inclusion while also leading the recruiting team in driving inclusivity in Riot’s hiring and talent sourcing processes. As a member of Riot’s executive leadership team, she ensures that D&I is tightly integrated into Riot’s broader strategy to identify, recruit, develop, and retain the best talent to create rewarding experiences for players.

During her more than 20 years of HR experience, Roseboro has held positions leading diversity and inclusion,

talent management, and leadership development for companies in technology, financial services, asset management, government, entertainment, and manufacturing. Prior to joining Riot, she was the global head of diversity, equity, and inclusion at Dropbox. Previously, she provided human resource guidance to Fortune 500 companies, including T. Rowe Price, Jones Lang LaSalle, Genworth Financial, Whirlpool Corporation, and Manpower International.

Roseboro has received numerous awards and recognitions for her work, including *Black Enterprise’s* Top Executives in Diversity, *The Network Journal’s* 25 Influential Black Women in Business, and 50 Out Front for Women’s Leadership, Diversity and Inclusion. She has been featured in the *Chicago Tribune*, *Diversity Journal*, and the Commercial Real Estate Women’s Network. Roseboro studied at the University of Louisville and Roosevelt University.

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

Angela Roseboro: After the death of George Floyd, I got a lot of emails from people within Riot who wanted to help, though many of them expressed that they didn’t know what to say or questioned whether it was appropriate to say anything at all in this very emotional moment. To help start the conversation, I wrote a letter to the company to provide my insights and experience, not from a CDO perspective, but as

a Black woman, wife, mother, and aunt. Frankly, I am usually very protective of those aspects of myself, given that our work is to drive inclusion for all. But I felt that telling my story was super important when it came to bringing perspective on what the Black community was experiencing, especially when it came to describing our relationship with the police.

When we decided to take a stance, we wanted to create thoughtful and deliberate actions to drive change. We focused in three areas: supporting organizations focused on racial equality, building economic wealth in Black communities, and building talent pipelines into the gaming community for Black Americans. Thanks to insights from our Black employee resource group, we committed \$1 million to the Innocence Project and the ACLU. We plan to invest \$10 million in start-ups and other investments founded by underrepresented minorities in the game industry. Finally, we are investing in Florida A&M University's computer science program to build a pipeline of talent for our industry. I'm very proud of what we are doing at Riot. We not only doubled down on our current efforts but are also making our industry more accessible to a community that has been historically overlooked.

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

AR: I do think the work is a bit more challenging, but not for the reasons I feared initially. With the 2008 recession, I saw a lot of companies scale back on D&I efforts. If D&I is not ingrained in a company's overall strategy, it is seen as a "right thing to do" strategy versus a "must have to be competitive" strategy. When a company then has the tough decision to cut budgets, our departments are quickly deemed nice to have but not essential.

The pandemic brought us to the table in a very different way. In our new virtual world, inclusion and engagement have to be a priority. Companies like Riot whose employees are not used to a work-from-home environment have had to find new ways to help employees stay connected and involved. We've also had to help managers set clear expectations and effectively manage a remote workforce. The D&I team has been integral in creating new programs to keep our Rioters—



what we call our employees—engaged and ensure that inclusive practices are not forgotten simply because we're not physically in the office. During this time, I have been blessed to have access to amazing D&I leaders in this space. I am a member of Twitter's Inclusion, Culture and Diversity Council, which allows us to share best practices, some of which I have implemented at Riot. It has been great to see that, in a time when I expected budgets to be cut, committed companies are committed to bringing us to the table, and the work has been not only valued but very much appreciated.

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?

AR: I think, honestly, the work found me. I started my career as a human resources generalist with the goal of leading the HR function. I was asked to take on a diversity role, first as an assignment, then full-time. In the beginning, I was very reluctant to take on the role, as I did not want to be seen simply as the Black woman discussing representation and inclusion of Black people. I felt I could be most impactful in HR by ensuring that processes were fair and inclusive. In contrast, the

diversity role typically doesn't own the processes, but instead relies on influence to hold others accountable for actual change.

I also questioned how I could drive change in a company for marginalized groups when I was experiencing some of the same issues and barriers.

At the time, my oldest daughter was becoming a promising soccer player. During one of her games, she was called a word that was not her name by an opposing player—she was 10 years old. I not only saw her fight through her hurt, but also saw her white teammates come to her defense and risk their first championship if the player was not removed. There was a happy ending. The player was removed and her team won the regional championship.

I knew two things that day: millennials and gen Zers, who were more exposed to difference than were the generations before them, might make this job obsolete one day, and I had to do my part to make sure she does not have the same barriers and obstacles that I faced. I still fight to achieve those goals today.

IN: Tell us about your greatest success story pre-COVID-19.

AR: I came to Riot when it was in the middle of transforming the culture; trust was low and the media still described the organization as “toxic.” With leadership committed to change, we spent the first 90 days listening to Rioters, analyzing data, and reviewing people processes. As a result of this foundational work, we were able to create an action plan, which resulted in some good forward movement in our culture, representation in leadership, and positive trends in satisfaction scores from women and underrepresented groups.

Having said that, we still have a lot of work to do. Numbers are only one part of the story; true success is measured by the impact on our people. I often ask women at Riot whether they would recommend Riot as a place to work to their friends and family. While we're still early in the journey, I'm hearing yes more and more.

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



In February, Angela attended Riot's first ever game night in celebration of Black History Month.

“We focused on three areas: supporting organizations focused on racial equality, building economic wealth in Black communities, and building talent pipelines.”

AR: I think 2020 has been, in many ways, one of the most challenging years yet. We are still in the middle of a pandemic, the 2020 election is looming, and the demand for racial justice and equality is changing conversations. I have said this for a while: to make progress in diversity and inclusion we need a new playbook. But I believe new thinking is even more relevant now given many of these challenges are ones we have not had the opportunity to see before.

The three most impacted areas are artificial intelligence, health disparities, and racial inequities. AI is a broad topic and a major impending challenge. As AI becomes an increasingly larger part of our society, I feel we are running out of time to get ahead of the racial and gender biases being built into systems. These systems will ultimately determine outcomes based on flawed logic that will negatively impact marginalized groups.

The numbers tell us that the coronavirus pandemic is killing underrepresented groups at disproportionately high rates. I don't think the health-care disparities in minority communities are new, but I do think that the pandemic provides an urgent reminder that we need to be thinking about what we can do in our companies to support our employees and help impacted communities too. Education, partnerships, and wellness offerings are all even more critical now.

So many companies have made statements about racial inequities and have pledged support to the Black community. For example, as Riot was determining our stance in support of the Black community, I honestly hesitated at first. I wanted to make sure that we could hold true to our commitment and that our commitment would make a difference. Now that the statements have been made, as practitioners, we need to be at the forefront of holding our companies accountable for following through and holding the organizations accountable for achieving their goals toward racial equality. **IN**



Celeste Warren

Vice President,
Global Diversity and
Inclusion Center of
Excellence,
Merck

As the leader for Merck's Global Diversity and Inclusion Center of Excellence, Celeste Warren is responsible for working with Merck's global leaders to advance and embed diversity and inclusion as a strategic approach in order to maximize business performance and create a competitive advantage.

Warren joined Merck in 1997 and has held numerous positions of increasing responsibility within its human resources organization. Most recently, she was vice president, Human Resources for Merck's Global Legal, Compliance, Communications, Population Health, Patient Health, and Global Public Policy Organizations. Prior to that, she held the role as vice president, Human Resources for Merck's Manufacturing Division and Global Labor Relations and US Employee Relations Center of Excellence.

Prior to joining Merck in 1997, Warren worked for nine years in human resources at Kraft Foods Inc. and General Foods and held several positions of increasing responsibility, including such roles as training and development leader, diversity leader, labor relations director, and human resources leader for several organizations within Kraft and General Foods.

She has been honored with many awards, including *Black Enterprise's* Top Executives in Global Diversity and Inclusion, *Savoy* magazine's Most Influential Women in Corporate America, 21 Leaders for the 21st Century, and *DiversityGlobal's* Influential Women in Global Diversity.

Warren attended the University of Kentucky, where she earned her BS degree. She received her master's degree in Human Resources from Carnegie Mellon University.



Celeste Warren moderates a panel of senior leaders during their annual Global Diversity and Inclusion Experience Month Kickoff event.

Inclusion: 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?

Celeste Warren: Certainly, my early childhood experiences shaped much of my life's focus. I was born in a small steel-mill town in western Pennsylvania. My father was the first Black teacher, principal, and later superintendent in that part of the state. As a child, I watched him go through much adversity, which he met with steadfast dedication, commitment, and devotion to his belief that we were all created equal and deserved equity in our personal and professional lives. I also watched my mother, who was a stay-at-home mom, support him, counsel him, and get angry with him—and with such passionate strength. I guess you could say that my parents informed my fundamental belief system and instilled in me the determination to fight for equity.

My professional path included a number of positions of increasing responsibility in the human resources field, but my passion has always been on working to advance equity across all the dimensions of diversity. Today, my current role at Merck means I am focused on my life's work, and it has empowered me to make a greater impact on the organization and its initiatives and efforts.

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

CW: In many ways, the COVID-19 pandemic hasn't changed our work—rather, it has amplified our diversity and inclusion efforts across the company and the impact we have on the communities where we live and work, as well as on the patients we serve. And I can honestly say our commitment to diversity and inclusion never wavered during this time.

At Merck, known as MSD outside the United States and Canada, a key focus during this pandemic is not only to keep all our employees safe, but to ensure there are safe places for employees. That led to stepping up our efforts both on fostering a diverse workforce and on leading inclusively. Importantly, managers were directed to be even more purposeful about checking in on their employees to make sure they were adapting to a more intensified fusion of home and work and that they could meaningfully contribute and thrive as part of a team, even outside worksites.

In addition, we expanded our work and support to advance health equity. This pandemic and its spread, particularly among underrepresented communities, were spotlighting the problem of health disparities, which have existed for a long time. And while health disparities are a deeply entrenched societal issue, companies have an opportunity to play a meaningful role and help reverse those trends. I'm excited to see the impact of our recent commitment to increase funding to fight health disparities in communities of color across the nation.

These efforts are aligned to the company's D&I strategy for 2020 and beyond, which was developed last year before the pandemic hit. However, in light of COVID-19, we couldn't continue with business as usual. Instead, we are working to redouble our efforts. It may seem like a daunting task, but one thing this pandemic has taught us: if we don't help everyone, we will all feel the impact.

IN: As the reported instances of discrimination against Asian Americans have increased because of COVID-19, is this a concern that you and your organization are addressing? How?

CW: During health crises, underserved communities can be especially adversely impacted, and this is an even further challenge to the way we nurture diverse and inclusive workplaces. For example, during the Ebola outbreak, many individuals of African descent were blamed for Ebola. The LG-BTQ+ community continues to experience AIDS discrimination. Unfortunately, during the COVID-19 pandemic, blame has been directed toward our colleagues in the Asian community.

Within Merck, we quickly began working with our COVID-19 crisis team to ensure that the actions they were implementing included tools and resources that spread awareness and understanding, and allowed employees to better fight intolerance or any negative treatment of our Asian colleagues across the globe.

In addition, we joined with our partners at Ascend (the largest, nonprofit pan-Asian membership organization for business professionals and executives in North America) to affirm a five-point action agenda.

Promote Inclusion: Advocate for a diverse and inclusive workplace and society

Raise Awareness: Highlight the unique impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups

Denounce Bias: Encourage individuals to report virus-linked discriminatory acts against Pan-Asians and other targeted groups and communities in the workplace and in public

Support Communities: Contribute time, knowledge, and/or other resources to aid frontline workers, COVID-19 victims, and families



Celeste Warren brings together all of the members of the Diversity Ambassador Teams to ensure alignment as they work together to drive impactful change.

Our efforts in workforce development have centered around partnerships with many organizations focused on closing the gap in students of color in STEM fields. We work with Year Up, which aims to close the opportunity gap by ensuring that young adults gain the skills, experiences, and support that will empower them to reach their potential through careers and higher education. We have a partnership with INROADS, an international nonprofit organization that prepares talented, diverse youth for corporate and community leadership. For more than a dozen years, we have partnered with Hispanics Inspiring Students' Performance and Achievement to continue to deliver on its mission to inspire Latinx students to discover their potential and ignite their desire to embrace education and achieve success.

IN: What will be some of the biggest issues and challenges in 2021 for a corporate diversity and inclusion leader like yourself?

CW: We have come a long way within the walls of our respective companies in terms of internal workforce representation and inclusion. However, we know that as many as we have reached, we have many more to enlighten—and we will continue to work to close the gap between those who have benefited from our efforts and those who still need our support to drive D&I across the organization.

Perhaps the largest opportunity for businesses to play an important role in the future in diversity and inclusion is to reach outside our organizations to help mend the divide in our communities. Businesses can help advance unity through economic inclusion initiatives, which could be an important part of the solution to eliminate disparities in underrepresented communities all over the globe.

As D&I leaders, we need to help our companies support this shift by building additional capabilities, such as relevant global policies and knowledge of economic issues and the challenges impacting marginalized communities, in addition to workforce representation strategies. Only by understanding D&I in a much more holistic way—not only within our organizations but outside the organizations and how they operate as part of society—will we be able to help our organizations succeed in the future. It is through this transformation and journey that we will become the unapologetic ambassadors for change that our organizations and the world are calling for. **IN**

Give Donations: Provide funds and/or other resources to support vulnerable populations of people and impacted businesses

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

CW: Our company has been working on actions to support our community and close racial inequities long before the social unrest that we have seen since the horrific murder of George Floyd and other African Americans in the United States. We have amplified our efforts and are committed to doing more to impact sustainable change, not just within our company, but in the underserved communities that need resources and help.

We focus our efforts in four key areas—internal work environment, health equity, economic inclusion, and workforce development—to create change within and outside our company to deliver meaningful impact in the fight against systemic racism.

In our internal work environment, we work with leaders to drive accountability for building a diverse and inclusive work environment for our employees through specific talent management, talent acquisition, learning, and development efforts.

Within our company, we have a number of programs to address health disparities around the world, including Merck for Mothers. This \$500 million global initiative aims to help create a world where no woman has to die giving life—irrespective of where she lives or the color of her skin. We are also committed to improving health literacy around the world to help advance health equity, impact population health outcomes, and drive efficiencies in health-care systems.

Merck is a leader in advancing economic inclusion and supporting minority- and women-owned businesses. Because of the important role that business can play in supporting economic inclusion and supplier diversity, Merck created and sustained a 35-year-long effort to support small and minority-owned businesses. In 2017, we were inducted into the Billion Dollar RoundTable, an organization that recognizes corporations that achieve—and maintain—at least \$1 billion annually with minority- and women-owned suppliers headquartered in the United States.

“... one thing this pandemic has taught us: if we don't help everyone, we will all feel the impact.”



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

"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."

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

“Our CEO held a special-edition town hall meeting where he discussed his personal experiences with racism.”

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**



Michelynn Woodard

Head of Social Impact, Diversity & Culture
Bad Robot Productions

Michelynn Woodard is the head of Good Robot, the corporate social responsibility, diversity, and inclusion arm of film and production company Bad Robot Productions. In addition, at the Katie McGrath & J. J. Abrams Family Foundation, she serves as senior adviser, helping to manage the family's philanthropic portfolio.

Previously, Woodard was a founding partner of the Artemis Agency, which developed and executed sustainable social-impact strategies for influencers, corporations, and nonprofits. Before founding Artemis, she ran philanthropy for talk show host Dr. Phil and his wife, Robin McGraw, and successfully integrated their causes into the popular broadcast. Woodard also led corporate social responsibility for JCPenney and launched the Kanye West Foundation with Dr. Donda West. She started her work in this field as an executive with the Creative Artists Agency foundation.

A graduate of Hampton University, Woodard spent much of her childhood abroad, which prompted her to become an avid traveler who is passionate about diverse communities and civic engagement. She serves on the board of several charitable organizations, including the California advisory board of the Trust for Public Land. She is the current board chair of the nonprofit Community Coalition.

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

Michelynn Woodard: We are living in extraordinary times. This turbulence can feel deeply unsafe, and the rhetoric often questions our intrinsic value in society. The ability to lead takes a level of fortitude that wasn't an original component of any role. This type of reckoning creates the opportunity to examine all facets of life and makes me even more grateful for the work that my company is doing during this moment.

At Bad Robot, we are striving to meet this moment with both compassion and clarity while using language that is unequivocal. Our approach is multifaceted. "Enough Is Enough" is the opening statement of our announcement of a \$10 million commitment over the next five years to organizations and efforts committed to an antiracist agenda. We've already completed an initial round of investments of \$200,000 to each of the following organizations: Black Lives Matter LA, Black Futures Lab, Community Coalition, Equal Justice Initiative, and Colin Kaepernick's KnowYour Rights Camp.

Next, we made a public commitment as storytellers and executives to dismantle white supremacy at work and at large. To that end, we compiled a comprehensive yet ever-evolving set of resources to share with friends and colleagues. *The Guide to Dismantling White Supremacy at Work* is available on our social media platforms.

Years ago we implemented the "Bad Robot Rule." For every open position, we recruit in proportion to the US population, i.e., half of the people interviewed are women, and at least 40 percent are people of color, etcetera. As a result of the commitment to that intentional work, over half of Bad Robot's leadership team are women, 60 percent of all employees are women, and nearly half are people of color. We have three television shows led by showrunners who are women of color, and that number will increase.

While we have acknowledged and celebrated Juneteenth for the past few years, this year we made it a permanent holiday. We also recently shared directories of mental health professionals representing Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color as well references for varying gender identities and sexual orientations.

Lastly, we've reengaged the experts who had already been working with us to mitigate bias and promote belonging. Now they will lead us through a series of facilitated affinity-

"'Enough Is Enough' is the opening statement of our announcement of a \$10 million commitment over the next five years to organizations and efforts committed to an antiracist agenda."

based discussions where we will talk about the challenges of racial anxiety and racial identity.

These are some examples of the hard work necessary to authentically engage with our colleagues across these lines of difference. Our goal is to create the level of trust necessary to have strong relationships across the organization, and that always leads to better business outcomes.

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

MW: I don't think anyone could have imagined when we went home on March 13, 2020, that months later we would still be a virtual organization with an unknown return date staring at the balance of an uncertain year. Being overscheduled has transformed into too many Zooms instead of too many meetings. For teams like mine that are focused on social impact, representation, and culture, we quickly needed to find new ways to communicate, engage, and invest. We also had to devise completely different metrics to gauge impact.

Internally, listening is our superpower, and that helped center how to best support our colleagues as we all navigated uncharted territory. The start was finalizing a partnership with a virtual coaching platform that one-third of our employees will have access to over the next 12 months. Then we launched virtual heritage month activations and created a variety of small groups to keep colleagues connected, like the Tiki Room cocktail hour for employees living alone, an affinity group for parents at home with young children, and a Bad Robot virtual Health Club. We also developed the "Good Robot Guide to Helping During a Pandemic," which is filled with nonprofit organizations that can urgently use support from our employee-giving program as well as numerous virtual volunteer opportunities.

Externally, we granted emergency funding to organizations in Los Angeles and New York focused on equity, hunger, domestic violence, and wage insecurity. We partnered with our vendors and sent trucks filled with food to the local food bank on a monthly basis. Most importantly, our production

company is a small part of the larger entertainment industry, and we often work together with agencies, studios, and others to support, coordinate, inspire, and push each other toward significant collective impact.

IN: As the reported instances of discrimination against Asian Americans have increased because of COVID-19, is this a concern that you and your organization are addressing?

MW: Yes, we are deeply concerned about anyone in the company experiencing the trauma of feeling unsafe, marginalized, and maligned in the way that Asian Americans are going through right now. This affects colleagues, friends in the industry, and their families. It's horrific and should not be a part of anyone's lived experience.

While virtual, we have been utilizing the safe space of our affinity groups to provide moderated opportunities for challenging conversations. We have over 90 percent participation throughout the company, and therefore we have been able to connect with almost everyone on a bimonthly basis. Our AAPI [Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders] heritage month activities recognized the contributions of AAPI creatives to entertainment and cinema, gave important news updates, provided recommendations for small businesses to support, and shared favorite family recipes. We remained focused on this throughout the summer as part of our series of expert-led sessions centered around race anxiety, race identity, and mitigating difference.

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?

MW: I am my father's daughter, and I learned a lot about this work from one of the best practitioners, my dad, Thurmond Woodard. We were best friends, and I always watched how he navigated work and the world. He was an incredible leader who worked tirelessly to create a new paradigm and opportunities around the world for those who could easily remain unseen. When he passed away, he was leading this work for Dell, which was the capstone of his career. My dad was respected for his character, his faith, and his wisdom, and I have letters, speeches, videos, emails, and voicemails that I can turn to on the most difficult days.

In addition to my dad, there is a legacy of service in my family. My grandfather Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Wilson was a Tuskegee Airman. I called him Daddy Teddy, and we have a lot of his memorabilia, including his wings, notes, and flight manuals, which serve as a constant reminder of

“We are deeply concerned about anyone in the company experiencing the trauma of feeling unsafe, marginalized, and maligned in the way that Asian Americans are right now.”

the courage that it takes to pursue the unimaginable.

My great-great-grandmother Maria Buckner Stokes graduated from Hampton Institute in 1890. Her daughter, my great-grandmother, Julia Bertha Stokes, graduated in 1918, and my parents, Suzanne Wilson and Thurmond Woodard, graduated in 1970. I became the fourth generation to graduate from Hampton in 1993. Service, education, and fighting for opportunity are literally in my DNA.

IN: Tell us about your greatest success story pre-COVID-19.

MW: As the leader of Good Robot at Bad Robot, we had the unique opportunity to create a program designed to immerse our employees in the various journeys of struggle and perseverance that many communities have endured due to systemic oppression and discrimination in America. We call these GOOD Trips, and we embark on each experience with a shared goal of discovering and examining our history and finding

truth and healing through historical exploration.

Weeks before departure, we start with mandatory readings and content to review and discuss. We use this time to understand each person's relationship to the history we are dissecting, to find acceptance in being uncomfortable, and to encourage vulnerability, which over time creates deep trust.

We explored the complex issues of systemic racism in Alabama and the rich history of San Francisco's LGBTQAI+ communities. We went to South Dakota to examine the history of the Native American community. On another trip, we embarked on a journey to Charlottesville, Virginia, to examine America's fraught history with slavery and white supremacy. We're proud that nearly one-third of the company has participated in an immersive experience, and we hope that, post-COVID-19, we will be able to continue our travels for years to come. **IN**



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.

The 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

“Step by step, we’re having the tough conversations at the company level.”

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.



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

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

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*



Denielle Pemberton-Heard

Connecting Unconventional Talent

Denielle Pemberton-Heard is indeed a connector. As the former chief executive officer of STEMconnector, chief legal officer of Diversified Search, and now a board member of Pod Network, the technology firm that recently acquired STEMconnector, she partners with leaders to identify talent for senior management, corporate boards, and nonprofit leadership roles across multiple sectors.

Pemberton-Heard previously spent fifteen years as group counsel, programming and business affairs at the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), the nation's largest noncommercial media enterprise, where she directed work on behalf of PBS and its 300-plus member stations and led negotiations with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Department of Education, the National Science Foundation, and arts and cultural institutions to create award-winning content. Before joining PBS, she held legal and business affairs leadership roles at Thales Inc., WarnerMedia, and Discovery Communications Inc., where she also supported retail initiatives, corporate philanthropy and community engagement.

She is a former regional judge for President Obama's Presidential Commission on White House Fellowships and has served as a trustee of the Toy Industry of America Foundation, on the Advisory Committee of the DC Volunteer Lawyers Project to end domestic violence, and on the Board of Governors of the Case Western Reserve University School of Law. She has published scholarly works on trademark and copyright law and has been a member of the professional faculty of the Johns Hopkins University Carey Business School. The married mother of two is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. and The Links Inc. and was recently featured as a guest on the *Michelle Obama Podcast* on Spotify.

INCLUSION: Given your work with Diversified Search, what motivated you to take additional responsibility of STEMconnector.

Denielle Pemberton-Heard: I was asked to step into the role and happily accepted the challenge to lead a phenomenal team. Our goal was to enhance

STEMconnector's technological capabilities, and after assessing the situation, it made sense to merge with Pod Network, an award-winning mobile app and technology platform that will enable STEMconnector to increase the accessibility and networking opportunities for clients and talent while maintaining its brand and clients.

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

DPH: STEMconnector has always been about increasing diversity in the STEM workforce and tapping into the desire of educators, corporations, and community organizations to invest in overlooked talent pools. We support corporate leaders as they consider their program initiatives and provide research on the STEM talent ecosystem as a whole, and connect them with the right partners to carry out the work. We connect community and volunteer organizations with philanthropic supporters of this work, and we engage a robust, cross-sector network of leaders to share their insights and best practices.

Our research team was among the first to clearly articulate the key issues that drive the STEM talent crisis. Our *State of STEM Report*, released in 2018, examined the nuanced gaps that make up the wider crisis by exploring demographic, geographic, fundamental skills, postsecondary, and belief gaps that lead to a lack of sustainable, diverse talent in the overall talent pool. In 2020, we launched a series, *Overlooked Talent Pools*, diving into the data about STEM for various communities in which we expect corporate leaders to invest and support.

It is my sincere goal that overlooked talent pools are not merely in vogue or engaged in a time of crisis as a quick response to national outrage. As a leader, I am pleased to be in a position to provide the tools that make the expansion of the talent pipeline a regular part of everyone's hiring practice. Science, technology, engineering, and math should not scare communities of color. There is no job or opportunity that is unachievable. There is no lack of talent, just lack of imagination to find it. I want girls and underrepresented youth to remember that this great country was built not by the hands of people who were engineers, but by those of people who were legally prohibited from reading, writing, or receiving a formal education, and yet they figured out how to design and build structures that remain standing as a testament to their innate abilities. No one group should have a monopoly on opportunity and the prospect of economic success: all are worthy and capable. When you assess who is qualified for a role, you need ask, by whose measure? It is critical that leaders understand the barriers to opportunity that prevent the widening of the talent pool in higher education, government, and Corporate America.

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

DPH: Having to shift to virtual so suddenly has drastically changed the way we think about our work and how we connect with each other. I came on as CEO of STEMconnector during the height of the pandemic



Pemberton-Heard with Tracy O'Such, a fellow partner with Diversified Search, and Christian Clerc, president, global operations, Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts.

frenzy. I never had an in-person meeting with our staff or attended one of the high-quality events that bind our network together. This has created a huge shift in the way we think about our day-to-day operations and meaningful engagements with each other and our network. While the pandemic has changed our approach to safety, it has also highlighted the need for connections you take for granted when you are in the office, such as the ability to quickly get feedback on something. We have to be more intentional about creating these opportunities. STEMconnector has Chief Fun Officers who look for physically distant ways to engage the staff, knowing those human connections are key to the success of a team. Activities such as virtual background contests, health and wellness challenges, happy hours, and trivia nights are planned to keep the staff connected beyond the day-to-day work.

The *STEMdaily* publication has seen a spike in viewership, and webcasts and Twitter chats have drawn in participants who might otherwise be unable to attend in-person events. There are traditionally over 10 events per year to dive into new research, hear best practices from across our network, and engage with each other in partnerships and networking. We're having to get creative in re-creating these experiences in a virtual world—ensuring we have compelling speakers and fresh content, and changing up the virtual setting to avoid “webinar fatigue.” Though we are virtual, our value proposition remains strong.

IN: Has the onset of COVID-19 and its impact on the economy made it more challenging to implement D&I efforts?

DPH: One of the key difficulties in supporting D&I efforts through the pandemic has been keeping people focused on these issues. When a global crisis affects the workforce at large, most companies start to worry about their ability to keep people employed at all, and keep their businesses alive, regardless of their diversity efforts. However, even early on, the research showed how much more likely the pandemic was to affect underrepresented and marginalized populations. These communities are more likely to have been affected physically and financially. It is more important than ever for D&I leaders to keep focused on this work and keep increasing opportunities for the communities adversely impacted by COVID-19. This is precisely why STEMconnector's research team continues to remain nimble and responsive to the market and the recent upskilling and reskilling presentation is evidence of this. I'm also uniquely positioned and remain committed to leveraging the synergies and legacy relationship between STEMconnector and Diversified Search to support clients and spread knowledge.

IN: As the reported instances of discrimination against Asian Americans have increased because of COVID-19, is this a concern that you and your organization are addressing?

DPH: This is not something we have confronted directly with our work. We ensure the inclusion and support of all of our employees and would not tolerate discrimination of any kind. We recommend that all companies make an effort to ensure they are not discriminating against their Asian or Asian American employees. Science matters, facts matter, the truth matters, and the manipulation of facts to advance discriminatory conduct is wrong—period. We all need allies, and I hope each of us will continue to speak up against discriminatory conduct of any kind.

IN: For 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?

“It is my sincere goal that overlooked talent pools are not merely in vogue or engaged in a time of crisis as a quick response to national outrage.”

DPH: While COVID-19 has perhaps made it more challenging to promote the business case for D&I, the recent BLM protests have brought the issue more front and center than ever. With employees standing up and demanding justice and equal opportunity and representation, companies that have not previously prioritized D&I efforts now fully realize they will be called out for exclusionary behavior. How a given company demonstrates an anti-racist commitment and builds a culture of inclusion and support for employees is a clear asset to attract and retain quality talent of all backgrounds. If companies can point to leadership from diverse backgrounds, ERGs, community engagement, and equal opportunity for promotions, they are more likely to attract the best diverse talent, which is key to any organization's bottom line. The business case is clear—the world is changing, and companies need to adapt or be left behind.

IN: What will be some of the biggest issues and challenges in 2021 for a corporate D&I leader like yourself?

DPH: None of us knows what to expect going into 2021 other than the only constant is change. There will be a new normal—we just don't know what it is yet.

College students are remaining close to home, and virtual learning demands technological capabilities. Community colleges should be the beneficiaries of a workforce that will operate differently.

The pros and cons of remote work are evolving, but for recruiters focused on D&I, geography may no longer be an impediment to identifying and placing talent. Employers are becoming more flexible to attract top talent as family obligations and existing community ties are discussed more openly. Most importantly, these changes have impacted how companies think about investments in skill building and long-range talent planning.

As a leader in this space, I wake up every day thinking about how I can help companies see the bigger picture. We have to get beyond focusing on the talent we need today or next month and instead look toward the talent we need 10 and 20 years from now and how to prepare people for those roles. We never could have anticipated the new challenges of 2020—in particular, the widening equity gaps for students forced to learn remotely and the blatant revelations of racial animus and hostility. The future starts now, and 2021 should be the year to speak truth to power. CEOs, nomination and governance committee members, and talent acquisition teams all have a role to play. As a collective, we need to support efforts to bridge the equity gaps to shape a workforce that reflects the new normal. **IN**



Vernā Myers

VP, Inclusion Strategy, Netflix

Vernā Myers is an inclusion strategist, cultural innovator, thought leader, attorney, and social commentator. She is currently Netflix's Vice President, Inclusion Strategy. In this newly created role, she helps devise and implement strategies that integrate cultural diversity, inclusion, and equity into all aspects of Netflix's operations worldwide.

Myers is the author of *Moving Diversity Forward: How to Go From Well-Meaning to Well-Doing* and *What If I Say the Wrong Thing? 25 Habits for Culturally Effective People*. Her inspiring TED talk, "How to Overcome Our Biases? Walk Boldly Toward Them," has been viewed almost 3 million times. Myers has been cited in *The Atlantic*, *Forbes*, the *Harvard Business Review*, and the *TED Radio Hour* on NPR.

She earned her BA from Barnard College and JD from Harvard Law School.

Inclusion: 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?

Vernā Myers: My decision to go both into law and into DEI stems from my deep sense of justice. That sense was instilled in me by my

incredibly principled parents and my childhood hero, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. I was only in elementary school when he was slain, but I made up my mind then to do my best to be the embodiment of King's dream and to live out his legacy of justice, equality, freedom, and dignity for everyone, especially my own people. His assassination definitely lit fires of rage in Baltimore where I grew up and around the nation. But from the angry ashes and the fear and shame of America came the opening of new doors of opportunity for a few, and I was one of those few who got to walk through them—new pools, summer jobs, math-enrichment camps, and open enrollment. This allowed me to ride across town out of my district to go my middle school of choice, which led to an awesome high school, then Barnard College, then Harvard Law School and on and on. I am grateful but also indebted to so many who sacrificed for me. I am committed to pushing as hard as I can to make change for others. This time, I hope that the doors of opportunity will expand to the point that Black folks and other marginalized groups get to walk through them.

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

VM: It hasn't so much changed my perspective. It has deepened my perspective about systemic inequalities, which I think COVID has laid bare. It's impossible to deny that we live in an unequal society, and what I have learned is that it is almost impossible to imagine the many unique situations people find themselves in depending on their race, religion, region of the world, gender, family obligations, mental health, economic status, and employer. You name it—difference makes a difference in how one experiences the same thing. As someone once said, "We might be in the same storm, but we are in different boats."

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

VM: It may have but it shouldn't. We need more, not less, inclusion work at a time of crisis. It's never been a more important time for companies to look at every decision that they're making through an inclusion lens, which is to say all of our decisions about interviewing, hiring, letting people go, promotions, compensation, provision of resources, travel, etcetera. I know some companies have had to make some difficult business decisions that affect their staff, but an equity and inclusion mind-set are imperative in these cases. If you don't have that mind-set, the decisions will inevitably be based on bias, assumptions, comfort, and

"Most companies have had to acknowledge that we are not all the same; factors like your family situation, health status, tenure, level, cultural identity, location all make a difference when it comes to how you experience the same workplace."



upholding the status quo. This means those who are in lesser positions in regard to status, social capital, and tenure in the company will be disproportionately impacted. Sadly, in most companies this is still people in underrepresented and historically marginalized groups. To make decisions fairly, we should always be keeping in mind the most vulnerable, not the best positioned.

IN: As the reported instances of discrimination against Asian Americans have increased because of COVID-19, is this a concern that you and your organization is addressing? How?

VM: It is terribly painful to see how prejudices rear their ugly heads in times like this, but it is not new. Crisis doesn't create discrimination; it uncovers it. Our Asian employees network hosted a conversation open to the company to share their concerns, feelings, and experiences about xenophobia. Members of our security team also participated, sharing their commitment to keep employees safe and to offer suggestions about the best way to deal with xenophobic acts. It opened all our eyes to the fear and anxiety that our own colleagues were experiencing. Our Inclusion Team followed with a company-wide talk with experts on the history of xenophobia, and how to recognize and interrupt xenophobia no matter where we see it, whether within our own walls or beyond.

IN: What will be some of the biggest issues and challenges in 2021 for a corporate diversity and inclusion leader like yourself?



Myers speaking at Qualcomm in 2017.

VM: I think we all need to use our imagination to think about how in this time of change we can fully integrate the practice of inclusion into the new workplace. I feel like COVID has helped us to uncover our weakness as well as our strengths. It's offered us an opportunity to confront some long-held beliefs about how to work and be productive that weren't necessarily true. For example, this is a time for us to think about how flexible we can be around work, how important it is to upgrade our mental health resources, how necessary inclusive, empathetic, and vulnerable leadership is to employee engagement. Sadly, many companies have learned through COVID that if you don't bias-proof your systems and practices—hiring, exiting, compensation, mentoring, feedback mechanisms, etcetera—underrepresented groups will be disproportionately and negatively impacted when times are difficult, erasing any progress the institution has made. We have seen the benefit of more frequent and transparent communication to minimize anxiety and keep the ship afloat. We have experienced the benefits and limitations of technology. Most companies have also had to acknowledge that we are not all the same; factors like your family situation, health status, tenure, level, cultural identity, and location all make a difference when it comes to how you experience the same workplace. We have been treated to a front row seat of how the “isms” and disparities affect how we live and work. My hope is that this awareness, empathy, and ability to flex will continue well after COVID and usher in a new, more inclusive workplace.

IN: This summer, as a result of Black Lives Matter protests focused on police reform, there has been an increased focus on the need for racial justice and equity in the workplace and in society in general. What is

“One important focus for us internally is making sure that we create the conditions for Black employees’ success in our own workplace.”

your company doing to advance change in your company or the community, or both?

VM: We are continuing our journey as a company to apply an inclusion lens to everything we do, whether it be with regard to our workplace and workforce or how we think about the business, our content, product, and customers. We were already investing in learning about bias, privilege, and allyship and connecting the dots between how what we do internally and externally is impacted and can interrupt systemic racism. The tragic and painful events that have opened more people's eyes to the issue of anti-Black racism in the US, and other parts of the world, have created a shared urgency. Like most companies, we are supporting groups and institutions that are at the forefront of change around these issues and continuing to increase representation of Black talent behind and in front of the camera and in our workplace. But we are also taking the time to think strategically about how we make this “more than a moment” and can be part of the solution around dismantling racial injustice and building a more equitable workplace and society. One important focus for us internally is making sure that we create the conditions for Black employees' success in our own workplace. We have lots of work to do, but we have made progress. We know our superpower is the power of storytelling. We have the ability to tell amazing stories about the complex lived experiences of people all over the world, for people to see their lives reflected and for all of us to see and respect the humanity of one another. **IN**



Susan MacKenty Brady

CEO, Simmons University Institute for Inclusive Leadership

Susan MacKenty Brady is the Deloitte Ellen Gabriel Chair for Women and Leadership at Simmons University—the first chief executive officer of the Simmons University Institute for Inclusive Leadership, which produces game-changing solutions for the purpose of intersecting leadership, equity, and inclusion.

Brady, who has been featured on ABC's *Good Morning America*, is the author of *Mastering Your Inner Critic and 7 Other High Hurdles to Advancement: How the Best Women Leaders Practice Self-Awareness to Change What Really Matters* (McGraw-Hill, November 2018) and *The 30-Second Guide to Coaching Your Inner Critic* (Linkage, 2014).

As a celebrated speaker and executive coach, she educates and ignites leaders globally on fostering a mind-set of inclusion and self-awareness.

Prior to joining Simmons, Brady worked at Linkage, Inc., where she founded the Women in Leadership Institute and launched a global consulting practice on advancing women leaders. She also led Linkage's field research behind the "7 Leadership Hurdles Women Leaders Face in the Workforce."

Dedicated to inclusively and collaboratively inspiring every girl to realize her full potential, Brady serves on the board of the not-for-profit Strong Women, Strong Girls. She lives in the Boston area with her husband, two teenage daughters, and two Portuguese Water Dogs.

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

Susan MacKenty Brady: COVID-19 has ignited the need for managers and leaders to have an entirely higher level of conscious awareness, relational and emotional expertise, change agency, and skillful dialogue. In addition, pre-existing structures of racism and inequity have been amplified by the global health crisis. How best do we manage our own and others' accountability remotely? The pandemic has slowed many of us down—save frontline workers—and while the inequities brought to light by the slowing down of the world have been here all along, not all of us have had to face their existence until now.

Seeing many organizational cultures go from one extreme (must have in-office face time) to another (work from home) has

“Higher education has a deep responsibility to bring its education, research, and community service to bear in advancing social justice and equity in society.”

— Dr. Lynn Perry Wooten,
President of Simmons
University



created an entirely new set of organizational and managerial challenges—ones that create the very real risk that women and other underrepresented populations are left behind. Knowing how to ensure the work environment is optimal for all who need to work is part of every leader’s job.

COVID-19 has magnified that leadership is needed everywhere, and to lead effectively today will require extra attention to specific leadership skills. There are very real consequences to our collective prosperity if we don’t equip leaders with the tools needed for success.

IN: What does it mean to lead inclusively?

SMB: Leading inclusively is a moment-to-moment practice. Needed changes won’t occur if we can’t tolerate feelings of vulnerability or practice the art of sincere curiosity. Inclusion requires self-awareness. It requires deep listening. It requires introspection. It requires respect for differences seen and unseen. It requires the willingness to constantly grow and learn. My colleague and our institute’s practice area Vice President of Allyship and Inclusion Elisa van Dam and I recently unveiled

the six practices that make up The Work of the Inclusive Leader. In it, we point out that “the Work of the Inclusive Leader™ isn’t a linear path. Instead, through continuous learning and action, leaders incorporate each new practice while continuing to engage in the previous practices.” The truth is we are all learning. I could be pretty advanced in my awareness about the sponsorship of women of color while fairly unaware of my biases about people with specific disabilities. At its core, becoming an inclusive leader is about returning to a place of respect for self and others. It is a return—and not a constant state—because as humans with feelings, we get triggered. We have opinions. We have unconscious knee-jerk responses. The name of the game is to return to our best self. Our best usually isn’t when we are self-righteous and indignant or lacking in curiosity or communicating when we are flooded with anger, or when we jump to conclusions. Our best usually isn’t when we are consumed with thoughts or feelings about how we’re not good enough or don’t quite measure up. Our best is when we feel open, interested, and okay in our own skin. It isn’t possible to lead inclusively or foster cultures of inclusion if we aren’t intentional about *being* in ways that inspire others to be it too.

IN: Has the onset of COVID-19 and its impact on the economy made it more challenging to implement diversity, equity, and inclusion learning both at the university and for the executives participating in the Institute for Inclusive Leadership?

SMB: At the university level, President Lynn Perry Wooten has voiced her strong commitment to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the Simmons community. She has established a team of senior Presidential Advisers on Diversity as well as a new Diversity Council to help advance DEI learning and initiatives in the midst of a pandemic and beyond. Equity was one of our guiding principles this year as we planned for our semester during the global crisis. Certainly, we recognize that equitable access to education has become more challenging due to COVID. The faculty have worked tirelessly this year to bring 300 undergraduate classes fully



“Leading inclusively is a moment-to-moment practice. At its core, becoming an inclusive leader is about returning to a place of respect for self and others.”

— Susan MacKenty Brady

online so students can continue to stay on track until we can resume classroom instruction.

At the Institute for Inclusive Leadership, we were lucky in that we were already positioned to offer rich and meaningful virtual learning experiences—meeting leaders where they were at, through online micro-courses. Leaders today at all levels are tackling some of the toughest leadership challenges, such as cultivating emotional intelligence, fostering diversity, leading inclusively, and embracing allyship. The institute was positioned to design and deliver on this before COVID-19 hit, and because the pandemic made virtual learning part of our everyday lives, it has fast-tracked the online learning curve in a way that can only be seen as impressive.

It is wonderful to align the university’s DEI work and commitment with the institute’s as we consider the most effective approaches to create inclusive campus communities and inclusive workplaces. COVID has only made that more of an imperative.

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

SMB: Higher education has a deep responsibility to bring its education, research, and community service to bear in advancing social justice and equity in society. Simmons has a long history of leadership in this arena, and we are focused on the recruitment and the support of a truly diverse and inclusive community of students, faculty, and staff. This year we are delighted to welcome our most diverse first-year class in more than four decades. In addition, we have created THRIVE, a key partnership with Human Resources that has transformed how Simmons recruits, hires, and includes underrepresented employees from diverse backgrounds. This initiative has resulted in significant gains, with staff hires of color increasing from 27 percent in 2018 to 42 percent in 2019.

Related to inclusion and equity in higher education more broadly, President Wooten recently wrote a compelling essay in *Inside Higher Ed* about the concern she has that COVID threatens to take its greatest educational toll on low-income, first-generation, and minority students who are more likely to have their educational path disrupted.

She wrote, “Our mission as educators must be laser-focused on equitable, long-term student success: establishing smoother and more predictable paths to completion for a wider spectrum of students, and delivering a high-quality educational experience that encourages persistence and engagement. We have an opportunity to effect real change and drive toward a greater level of inclusion and student success in the aftermath of this pandemic—if only we have the will to do so.”

At the Institute for Inclusive Leadership, we are fortunate to have a dream team of strategic advisers who have been instrumental in setting the course for meaningful discussion and change in their organizations. We are facing tough questions internally at Simmons and helping organizations navigate their own

course—tough questions like “How have we been shaped by the forces of racism?” and “What does it mean to be white?”

There is urgency now in the workplace to help well-intended leaders of all identities learn how to be an ally. Taking the mystery out of allyship and what it means to lead inclusively is no longer a “good thing to do.” It is, as it always needed to be, mission critical. Simmons defines allyship as using a position of power and/or privilege to actively support and advocate for women and members of underrepresented groups. Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) need the support of organizations like ours to enact change—and the time is now to take action.

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 university using these technologies? What are some of the cautionary tales we need to be aware of?

SMB: Simmons University offers an undergraduate degree in computer science and graduate degrees in library and information systems. Dr. Marie desJardins, dean of the College of Organizational, Computational, and Information Sciences at Simmons, who is an expert in artificial intelligence and machine learning, says, “Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) provide innumerable opportunities for increasing access and inclusivity. Speech recognition and generation, ‘smart prosthetics,’ cognitive assistants, and telerobotics can enhance communication, mobility, and connectivity for people with disabilities. Intelligent scheduling systems, predictive modeling, and natural language processing can increase the effectiveness and coordination of diverse teams working together across time and space.”

The concerns in recent years about the biases that ML-driven systems can introduce because of limitations and biases in the underlying data are not unfounded. Dean desJardins offers examples, such as racial bias in face recognition, credit scoring, and medical diagnosis. However, she is quick to point out that the “understanding and awareness of these potential biases have also driven the development of AI-fueled systems for increasing diversity in job recruiting, identifying and reducing bias in hiring and promotion decisions, and measuring adverse impact of workplace practices and policies.”

Many leading technology organizations, like Dell Technologies and Cisco, support the Simmons Leadership Conference. Their commitment to diversifying the talent in

the tech industry is far reaching and includes attracting and advancing women and other underrepresented populations into STEM professions generally and into tech fields specifically. When the majority of coders represent one gender or remain unaware of their own biases, we can’t shift the root of the problem.

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?

SMB: I joke that I was raised by wolves. I was raised by a single father for most of my childhood, and countless men supported me as mentors and teachers and advocates. It never occurred to me that I would be treated differently because I was a woman. When I realized meritocracy might not be a given for me, I couldn’t help but think about what that means for other underrepresented populations. Like so many women especially, I have the badge of resilience—the one I never asked for but earned just because I was born female. Probably because I had early experiences of feeling as if somehow I wasn’t okay the way I was, I have spent a good amount of my life cultivating conscious compassion first for myself and then for others and teaching this practice to others.

IN: Tell us about your greatest success story since the outbreak of COVID-19.

SMB: Without question, the greatest success story for our institute was pulling off our 2020 Simmons Leadership Conference virtually. In fairness, Simmons came into this pandemic with nearly a decade of producing online degree courses. That said, we had never hosted a 5,000-person virtual conference before. We had five weeks. The way our sponsors, partners, and clients all rallied to support our effort for the “show to go on” was very inspiring. We believe this Boston-based conference to be the longest consecutively running conference created to inspire women to lead in the country, possibly the world. We had to live up to our “premier” status.

The production was professional from beginning to end, and our (now virtual) phone has been ringing off the hook with requests to learn how we did it. The gratitude of our participants was overwhelming. Never underestimate the power of inspiration—especially at a time of crisis. The 42nd Simmons Leadership Conference, on March 23, 2021, will also be virtual. We can’t wait to eventually come back in person and feel the energy of thousands of women together again. (For more information, see leadership.simmons.edu/boston/.) **IN**



Shannon Schuyler

US Chief Purpose & Inclusion Officer, PwC

Shannon Schuyler, PwC's US chief purpose and inclusion officer, helps activate the firm's purpose to build trust in society and solve important problems and create a fulfilling work experience. Outside PwC's walls, Schuyler helps lead CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion™, which is committed to building more inclusive workplaces. She leads a team to harness the power of business to respond to systemic challenges that have created disparities across society.

At PwC, Schuyler helps connect purpose with belonging to create an environment in the firm that celebrates identity and intersectionality as a way to drive innovation and business value. She is responsible for furthering diversity, inclusion, and societal equity across the firm's workforce and communities through instituting formalized processes and programs.

Under her leadership, PwC helps to build a more equitable society by enabling its people to use their time, skills, and experiences to address social injustices. Two programs are central to this: AccessYour Potential is PwC's commitment to teach tech and digital skills to students in underserved communities; Skills for Society is PwC's pro bono program through which employees receive 40 hours to help nonprofit organizations and educational institutions address systemic causes that contribute to the opportunity gap.

In addition to D&I, Schuyler oversees the actions to achieve the firm's Net Zero Commitment.

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

Shannon Schuyler: For more than two decades, we have embraced and taken action to drive a culture where D&I is a foundational value of our workplace. Over the last year, following the murder of George Floyd, we accelerated our approach to using data to drive more progress faster within PwC and the society at large.

In June, we announced six new commitments to stand up against racism. Among other things, we launched our first Diversity and Inclusion Transparency Report in order to hold ourselves more accountable for progress, and we offer employees one-week paid volunteer time.

Action inside our four walls is only part of our commitment as a responsible business. In 2017, Tim Ryan, PwC US chair and senior partner, cofounded CEO Action for Diversity and Inclusion™, the largest CEO-led commitment to advancing inclusion in the workplace. This year, in the midst of a global pandemic and social unrest, when CEOs could have pulled back on diversity and inclusion commitments, we have seen the opposite—business leaders have stepped forward. Since June, we've increased our signatory base by over 40 percent, and now have 1,400-plus CEOs and university presidents committed to advancing D&I in their organizations.

Last summer, we expanded the efforts to address systemic racism in society by creating CEO Action for Racial Equity, a fellowship that provides the opportunity for signatories to advance racial equity through public policy and mobilizes the business community collectively across industries and regions to enact change. PwC committed 30 fellows, and two PwC senior leaders, Roy Weathers and Roz Brooks, are serving as the fellowship CEO and policy leader, respectively.

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

SS: For me, COVID-19 has reinforced how widespread systemic racism, racial inequities, and deep biases are in our society. It seems as if humanity is at risk emotionally, physically, and financially, and there is an urgent need for clear, immediate, and bold action from business, government, and each of us as individuals.

The pandemic combined with the murder of George Floyd and killing of other Black citizens has forced a lot of personal reflection on the privilege that I have. The privilege that has been granted to me based on my skin color. It has compelled me to challenge the way that I speak about the societal progress of women overall, when what I truly mean, after thoughtful reflection, is the progress of white women. With this awareness, I acknowledge that I can continue to do more to elevate women of color. When you look at the deep societal biases that have historically created a lack of opportunities, higher underemployment, and increased health risks for Black women—with the potential of death—we cannot afford to refer to “women” and think we authentically mean all women.

“There is much we can do together through collective efforts like CEO Action. But at a certain point, this group always stresses that we have to look inward as organizations and ask what more we can do within our own walls.”

As I reflect on the last six months, I am also keenly aware of the delicate dance we all have to do in order to manage things like personal self-care, family support, child care, home schooling, community connections, and myriad other things. In good times, these plates are hard to keep spinning, but we manage to keep most in the air. Now, those plates tend to fall—a lot. And that can lead to feeling like a failure across all the areas in addition to feeling isolated. There are many competing priorities, but taking time to be more empathetic to others and kind to yourself, and to give space and grace to those all around, has helped me.

IN: As the reported instances of discrimination against Asian Americans have increased because of COVID-19, is this a concern that you and your organization are addressing?

SS: Absolutely, and this started very early in the pandemic and has continued to be a heightened area of focus, discussion, and support. It is so important that you bring this up, as many in the Asian community do not feel that their struggle and the xenophobia they have encountered have been acknowledged in a strong enough manner. We work hard to actively counter the perception that if you aren't seeing something, it isn't happening. If you aren't leaving your home, you may not see the venom being directed at the Asian community, but it is definitely happening.

To address these challenges, we've doubled down on allyship so we can better support our Asian and diverse employees. We are working hard to ask ourselves how we can better demonstrate where we as a firm stand on this

issue. For us, that's meant refocusing on our inclusion networks so we have a stronger understanding of our Asian community and what they are struggling with and then mapping out how we can enhance our efforts to support them.

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?

SS: I have always had a sense of justice, fairness and, in many cases, have chosen the path less predictable driven by stubbornness, a need to disrupt the system and to feel like my actions have an impact—have meaning. As a young woman, I felt that I needed to live up to my strong and inspiring matriarchal family. Then, as I got older, I wanted to embrace the liberal thinking of my father, a great orator and teacher. Together, these needs brought me to where I am today. Now, it is my eight-year-old biracial son, who struggles with his identity as a Black boy when he wants to choose to be white since it is easier, safer, and more privileged. My mind and heart were always drawn to this space, even unknowingly, but now it is my son and my soul that keep me resilient and unyieldingly hopeful.

IN: Tell us about your greatest success story pre COVID-19.

SS: Admittedly, pre-COVID seems so long ago, and I focus more time looking forward, discerning how to evolve and be transformative in this new world—homing in on agility, dexterity, and grit. That said, when I slow down to take stock in our progress, I am humbled to have been a part of the creation and elevation of CEO Action. I vacillate back and forth between the timing of its creation being fortuitous or preordained. But either way, the conception galvanized CEOs around the diversity and inclusion in their workspaces three years ago, and now it continues to offer a safe place to be challenged, be courageous, be vulnerable, and to seek real change. Interacting with C-suite leaders galvanized around this corporate collaborative, growing and expanding the coalition, and really committing



Schuyler speaking at the 2019 CEO Action Closed-Door Session and CHRO & CDO Summit in New York City.

to take responsibility for their actions and work together to bring about true, sustainable change has been infinitely rewarding.

IN: Post-COVID-19, what is your organization doing to sustain this success?

SS: We are putting our people first from the beginning: layoffs as a last resort, paying out bonuses, honoring all offers—intern and full-time, including to the new hires who just joined the virtual firm in the past two months. We launched six new D&I commitments days after the murder of George Floyd, as we are not done or satisfied but rather driven and compelled to do more. I am proud of the totality of the commitments made but even more

so with the declaration to release our first D&I Transparency Report—a journey that we were on to achieve but completed over a year early. Sunshine highlights the beauty and gives clarity, but it also exposes the blemishes and the work to be done. Being transparent with our data has afforded us with both scenarios, and I strongly believe that our progress will be accelerated and draw others in to drive the movement.

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?

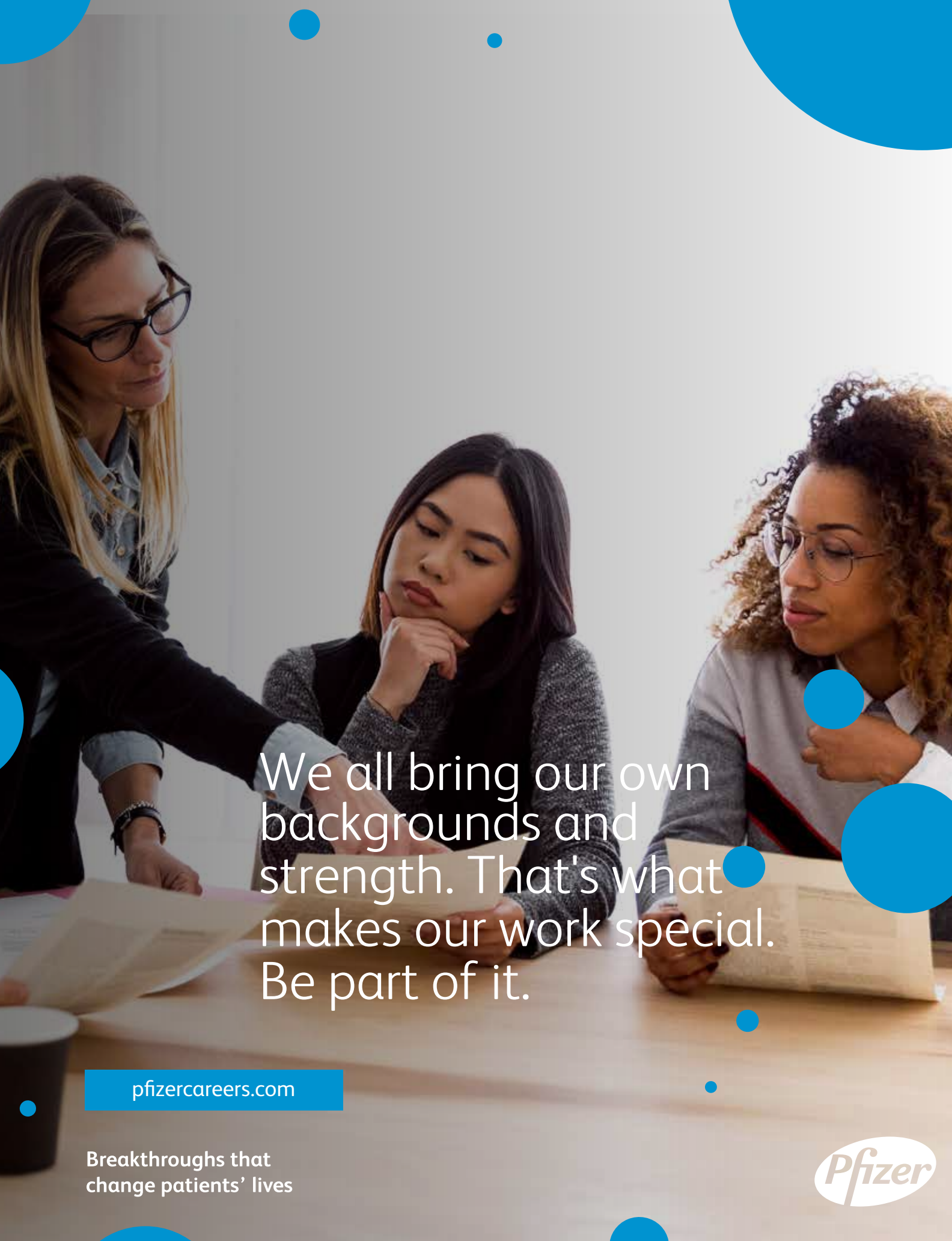
SS: Honestly, it depends on what case is actually sinking in. The most comprehensive business cases for D&I are around the impact on revenue and innovation, and yet last March, when COVID-19 was beginning to have business impacts, a number of companies furloughed or laid off their D&I teams in the first wave. Those actions do not align to the solid business case being communicated for decades.

With that said, the murder of George Floyd visibly and poignantly demonstrated the critical need to address systemic racism, and since then, D&I teams were brought back to companies and CEO Action has seen a 40 percent increase in signatories in the last six months. The business case now is not just on paper alone, but in protest, social media postings, and brand elevation. For now, this side of the case seems to be sinking in.

In September, PwC's Annual Corporate Directors Survey found the vast majority of those polled—84 percent—agree that companies should be doing more to promote gender and racial diversity in the workplace.

That being said, the same survey found that only 39 percent of directors think D&I goals should be included in executive compensation plans, and only 34 percent say it's important to have racial diversity on their corporate boards.

People understand conceptually the benefits in theory—now they have to put them in practice. I don't know if COVID-19 has made it more challenging, but I hope this pandemic accelerates the pace of change. **IN**

A photograph of three diverse women in business attire sitting around a table, reviewing documents. The woman on the left is pointing at a document. The woman in the middle is resting her chin on her hand, looking thoughtful. The woman on the right is holding a document and looking at it. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. There are several blue circles of various sizes scattered throughout the image, some overlapping the text and the photograph.

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backgrounds and
strength. That's what
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DIVERSITY WOMAN'S 2020 GAME CHANGER IN TECH



**Business
LEADERS**

**Women
INTECH**

DIVERSITY
CONFERENCE

The Diversity Woman Game Changer Award honors those who have made a significant impact on

advancing and supporting women in technology. This year we honor John Chambers, Freada Kapor Klein, and Salesforce. All of these award winners have altered the perception of women in tech by using their personal cachet and their platforms as leaders to drive equity and equality for women.

Lori Castillo Martinez, accepting the company

award on behalf of Salesforce, is an extraordinary leader in a company that has changed the game not only for women but in the field of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Salesforce has broken barriers for all underrepresented communities and continues to create best practices in support of women and people of color in technology.

John Chambers has been a role model for many CEOs at tech companies and has changed the game in many ways. He was one of the first Fortune 500 CEOs to make it a practice to focus on developing women at all levels, and he continues to ensure that the companies where he serves on the board include multiple women's perspectives because of the value women contribute.

Freada Kapor Klein has been a pioneer in the field of equity and inclusion since her early career. Klein is known for efforts to diversify the technology workforce through activism and investments. As Benjamin Jealous noted, she is "the moral center of Silicon Valley and an OG in technology."

— Marilyn Nagel, Chief Advocacy Officer, RISEQUITY

WOMAN SUPPORTING WOMEN AWARD

Freada Kapor Klein

Founder, Level Playing Field Institute

"Freada has dedicated her entire life to fighting for the most marginalized among us. Her brilliance, her passion, and her principled and unapologetic dedication to improving gender, racial, and socioeconomic equity make her a leader, a role model, and a true gamechanger."

— Allison Scott, CEO of the Kapor Center



Freada Kapor Klein is an entrepreneur, activist, and pioneer in the field of organizational culture and diversity.

In 1976, Klein co-founded the Alliance Against Sexual Coercion, the first organization to focus on sexual harassment in the United States. She is the founder of SMASH, now in its 18th year, which provides rigorous STEM education and access to social

capital for low-income high school students of color on 10 university campuses across the country. As a founding partner at Kapor Capital, Klein invests in seed-stage tech start-ups that close gaps of access, opportunity, or outcome for low-income communities and communities of color.

Klein is a member of the UC Berkeley Board of Visitors, as well as the council that formed the Hollywood Commission chaired by Anita Hill. She serves as an advisory board member of Generation Investment Management, and on the board of AnitaB.org. She is the author of *Giving Notice*, which details the human and financial cost of hidden bias in the workplace. She serves as a board member of the edtech company Genius Plaza and in 2019, her foundation, the Kapor Center, joined 10 other foundations to establish the nation's first philanthropic fund to support women of color who are leading the fight against sexual harassment and violence.

MALE ALLY AWARD

John Chambers

Chairman Emeritus, Cisco
CEO, JC2 Ventures



"I've always believed and supported women in technology—in part because my mom was a doctor who broke many of the gender barriers in medicine, athletics, and academics. At Cisco we focused on diversity from the very beginning of the company, with one of the founders being a female. As CEO, we always had two to three women on the board, before others did, and not for societal reasons; it was plain good business. You need to have

role models as you look up through the organization and I am proud of how many women were in executive positions at Cisco—from HR to IT to sales to engineering to marketing—and now, it's a top priority for the start-ups I mentor."

—John Chambers

John Chambers is founder and CEO of JC2 Ventures, which focuses on helping disruptive start-ups from around the world build and scale. He invests in companies that are leading market transitions such as Aspire Food Group, Balbix, Bloom Energy, Dedrone, IoTium, Lucideus, OpenGov, Pindrop, Privoro, Rubrik, SparkCognition, Sprinklr, and Uniphore. He serves on the board of directors for Bloom Energy, OpenGov, Pindrop, and Sprinklr. Chambers is the author of *Connecting the Dots: Lessons for Leadership in a Start-up World*, in which he shares new rules for disruption and lasting success in the digital age. He is also the chairman of the US India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF) and was appointed Global Ambassador of French Tech by President Emmanuel Macron of France in January 2018. Prior to founding JC2 Ventures, Chambers spent more than 25 years with Cisco, serving as CEO, chairman, and executive chairman. He currently holds the title of chairman emeritus with the organization.

COMPANY CHANGING THE GAME FOR WOMEN IN TECH AWARD

Salesforce

Lori Castillo Martinez, Vice President, Global Employee Relations and Equality, accepting the award on behalf of Salesforce



"Women are still largely underrepresented in the workforce and in leadership—a problem compounded for women of color. At Salesforce, our goal is to create a workplace that reflects the diverse communities where we live and work. It isn't just the right thing to do; it's the smart thing to do—allowing businesses to drive innovation and build deeper connections with their

customers. As a Latina, this work is something I'm personally passionate about and have been fortunate to make a career out of."

—Lori Castillo Martinez

Lori Castillo Martinez is vice president of global employee relations and equality at Salesforce, where she is focused on performance and employee relations management across the globe as well as driving equality initiatives at the company. Her role was uniquely designed as a way to accelerate and integrate people and equality initiatives at Salesforce.

Previously, Martinez spent nearly a decade at McKesson, where she created the first enterprise-wide strategy, processes, and systems for key legal, ethics, and regulatory risk areas. Before that, she spent 11 years at Intel working in HR and compliance. Throughout her career, she has made a tangible difference in practice and culture in both the life sciences and tech sectors.

Martinez is also driven by her passion to improve the way women live and work. She serves on the board of Rhia Ventures, a nonprofit venture capital firm investing in reproductive health-care solutions that empower women.

THE LAST WORD

What a Year!

Like pretty much everyone else, I have thought many times, “I can’t wait until 2020 is over.” The longest and hardest year of our lives is coming to a close, and I couldn’t be happier. For starters:

- ▶ The trial and impeachment of an American president.
- ▶ The death of NBA legend Kobe Bryant, his daughter Gianna, and seven others in a tragic helicopter crash.
- ▶ The COVID-19 pandemic sweeping across the world, sparing no country.
- ▶ The economy crashing, and unemployment rising to its highest level since the Great Depression.
- ▶ The killing of George Floyd, prompting worldwide protests against racially biased policing, which spurred a rise in awareness of systemic racism and the challenges facing BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color).
- ▶ Wildfires destroying homes and forests in the West and forcing millions to stay inside to escape the smoke.
- ▶ The worst hurricane season on record, with 27 named storms as of November 1.
- ▶ The death of civil rights icon John Lewis.
- ▶ The unexpected death of actor Chadwick Boseman.
- ▶ The sad passing of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg, who may have done more than anyone for the rights of women in the workplace.
- ▶ A second and then a third COVID-19 surge racing across the United States. As of November 10, more than 10.1 million Americans had contracted COVID-19, and more than 239,000 people had died.

▶ And of course, the November 3 election, arguably the most momentous in our lifetimes.

This list doesn’t even take into account the many everyday challenges we all faced, from sheltering in place and working from home to trying to maintain an equilibrium in our lives.

Yet, as we close out the year, I am hopeful. Not only is it hard to imagine a more difficult year than 2020, but I believe in the American people and am genuinely hopeful that the challenges will turn into positive changes that make our country and the world a better place. We’ve already started:

Much of Corporate America has embraced the message of equity embodied in the Black Lives Matter movement and has metrics and programs in place to create equality.

The future of work became a reality, fast. We rolled up our sleeves and got creative in our ability to work from home and adopt new technology.

We learned that we have a hidden reserve of resources that keeps us going in the face of adversity.

People became kinder and more empathetic. For example, companies grew immensely in their recognition of the mental health challenges facing their employees.

We recognized the things that really matter in life—and embraced them.

As we look back, we realize that no one was spared and that essential workers and Black and Brown communities bore the brunt. Everyone suffered, and therefore everyone has



experienced a need to dig deep and find the strength and will to persevere and even create and thrive.

I believe and hope that what we learned in 2020 is going to help us turn 2021 into a much more satisfying and safer year. I know I’ve grown in 2020—I made new connections and strengthened exist-

ing ones, and not only did I keep my company afloat during the economic downturn, but I even added new customers. I also added new product lines designed specifically to serve the needs of my clients during these challenging times. Most gratifying, I am finishing a book that will help women become healthier and fulfill their leadership potential. And I was able to safely continue a walking regimen and accomplish a weight-loss goal of 30 pounds!

As you will discover in this issue of *Inclusion*, DEI leaders have seized the moment. They have guided their companies through the daunting challenge of staying safe, productive, and receptive to the needs of their employees. I believe the innovations generated this year will become blueprints for how we work and live for decades to come.

Please join me in (virtually) applauding all of us for rising to the occasion in 2020, and here’s to 2021! **IN**

Dr. Sheila A. Robinson is the founder of Diversity Woman Media.

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Magazines

Read (And Learn) With Intent

It's time to bring forward-thinking collaboration and "what is possible" to the forefront. Our two publications — Diversity Woman Magazine and Inclusion Magazine — present the extraordinary and fiercest minds of leaders, executives, and industry professionals to exchange ideas on the most significant issues.



Diversity Woman Magazine is the essential business magazine and community for women professionals and executives, with an initiative to support leadership and executive management development for all women of all races, cultures and backgrounds. Through an exchange of resources, knowledge, insights, and research, you will continue to transform your career and celebrate your successes.

Inclusion Magazine is the premier inclusive business magazine with a community of professionals and executives who champion equity and equality in the workplace. This consortium of thinkers and innovators focus to provide resources, insights and practices to develop fully-represented teams, create global initiatives, discuss solutions and build culturally competent corporate structures.

[VIEW PAST DIVERSITY WOMAN MAGAZINE ISSUES](#)

[VIEW PAST INCLUSION MAGAZINE ISSUES](#)



At Cisco, we view inclusion and collaboration as the bridge to connect diverse perspectives. Spark new ideas. Imagine new possibilities. Challenge the status quo. Inspire innovation. And unleash the full power and potential of our people.

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