

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION
HALL OF FAME

THE SECRET POWERS OF
NEURODIVERGENT TEAMS

PUSHING FOR GENDER
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INCLUSION

*Creating Globally Inclusive
& Culturally Competent
Workplaces*

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DEI STRATEGIST

Leading the Charge
on Implementing
Inclusive and
Equitable Practices

**DANI
MONROE**





Dani Monroe

Trusted Advisor, Innovator, and Strategist

Dani Monroe is one of the premier voices on diversity, equity, and inclusion to CEOs, chief diversity officers, and other senior executives. She has traveled the globe working toward justice and equity for all. Monroe began her career several decades ago and has held chief diversity officer roles and managed a successful global consulting business.

From 2016 to 2021, Monroe served as the inaugural senior vice president and chief diversity and inclusion officer for Mass General Brigham, Massachusetts's largest health-care organization and largest private employer with 82,000 employees. She led the organization through a systemwide approach with the goal of increasing diversity at all levels and fostering inclusion and engagement for all employees while implementing a United Against Racism strategic plan.

Mass General Brigham's CEO, Dr. Anne Klibanski, said that "perhaps Dani's most important and lasting contribution to Mass General Brigham is her central role in the development of our United Against Racism strategy—a strategy that sets our path forward in creating and maintaining an antiracist institution."

Prior to joining Mass General Brigham, Monroe was president and founder of Center Focus International Inc., one of the top global diversity practices in the United States, where she led C-suite executives of Fortune 100 companies in global diversity, inclusion, and organizational effectiveness, favorably impacting their bottom lines, reputations, and business potential.

Monroe also served as senior director of global diversity and inclusion at Pfizer. In this highly visible global role, she designed and facilitated strategies that integrated all components for diversity and inclusion—from metrics and accountability for senior leaders to leadership curriculum and inclusive work processes.

Her book, *Untapped Talent: Unleashing the Power of the Hidden Workforce* (Palgrave Macmillan, April 2013), has received glowing national and international reviews. Monroe is the recipient of numerous recognitions, including the prestigious Pinnacle Award from the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, the YWCA Academy of Women Achievers Award, and the *Boston Business Journal* Lifetime Achievement Award in diversity. In 2021, she was named one of the 50 Most Influential Black Women in Massachusetts. From 2012 through 2019, Governors Deval Patrick and Charlie Barker



appointed Monroe to the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women, and Massachusetts Economic Development Council.

She holds a master's degree in organizational development from Pepperdine University's Graduate School of Business and is a well-received speaker at key diversity conferences.

Inclusion: How do you recommend organizations implement equity measures?

Dani Monroe: To address equity, organizations must first acknowledge there are inequities in their system. This is quite different from equality, where you essentially treat everyone the same. Equity is an understanding that not everyone starts from the same point of advantage and that there are different circumstances for everyone. Therefore, different allocations, resources, opportunities, and processes are required to achieve an equal outcome.

A good way to begin is by conducting an audit of an organization's policies, procedures, and practices. In some systems, those steps would include examining equity in pay and benefits and establishing hiring practices that eliminate as much bias as possible. Or it could be creating talent management systems that identify all talent, with a focus on how diverse talent is progressing. Another method would be creating systems where all employees receive up-to-date information even if they don't use a computer as part of their jobs.

IN: What brought you to this work?

DM: I like to say DE&I work found me—I did not go looking for it. I grew up in a multicultural family and lived in a remarkably diverse community

“Bringing one’s whole self to work has a different definition than two years ago. Employees demand that their personal lives and the social context in which they live be discussed and addressed at work.”

on California's Monterey Peninsula. Not only did we go to schools that had Black, Mexican, Asian, Portuguese, and white students, but in a small town, you knew everyone. I was immersed in a diverse society before I even understood the power of diversity. This is not to say we did not have challenges across ethnic lines: we socialized in and out of school, but boundaries were created around dating. Our rules of engagement included an unspoken understanding that race and family membership defined your tribe.

It was not until completing graduate school that I began to consciously understand race and its implication for my success and that of other people of color. With a master's in organization development, I dreamed of leading large system changes: reorganizations, plant turnarounds, performance efficiency improvement projects. However, every place where I applied turned me down. I even had a mentor, Bob Tanenbaum, PhD, a founder

of organization development, intervene on my behalf at a tech company. The feedback was that I “didn't have the right communication skills.”

Rejected but not discouraged, I hung out my private practice shingle in the middle of a recession. That was true optimism on my part. It was slow going until one day when I read a *Black Enterprise* article on how some corporations were developing Black and Latino leaders. Dr. Price Cobbs, a psychiatrist in San Francisco and author of the best-seller *Black Rage*, was leading cross-race work in corporations, designing processes and practices for Black and Brown employees and their managers.

Excited, I called Price, because you could make a cold call in those days. We explored the intersection of organization development and the professional development of Black and Brown people. Three months later, I was working for him. As I traveled across the US—working for Digital Equipment, 7-Eleven, AT&T, and others—I began to witness the phenomenon I wrote about 30 years later in *Untapped Talent: Unleashing the Power of the Hidden Workforce*.

The brilliant Black and Brown leaders I was working with in five-day leadership trainings could not get promoted. They were settling for lesser assignments and being invisible to their white manager. My mind or spirit could not let go of the injustice I was observing and the frustration I felt for these supremely talented individuals who lingered in the lower to middle levels of corporations because their talents weren't packaged like “white America.” While we have made significant progress, this pattern still exists today.

Over my 40 years in DE&I, I have never wavered in my focus of promoting Black and Brown people to success. Even when it wasn't popular, it has been my passion and the guiding beacon of my career.



Inaugural chief diversity and inclusion officers across Mass General Brigham.

Left to right: Tim Ewing, PhD, Brigham and Women's Hospital; Erin Miller, MS, Newton Wellesley Hospital; Dani Monroe, MSOD; Nawal Nour, MD, Brigham Women's Physician; Joe Betancourt, MD, Mass General Hospital; Kimberly Troung, PhD, MGH Institute of Health Professionals.

IN: Tell us about your greatest success story.

DM: My last assignment is the crown jewel of my body of work. In 2014 I was invited to consult to the largest private employer in Massachusetts, Mass General Brigham.

Charged with moving the corporate office's work forward, we created a strategic plan and vision, and launched the first diversity council and educated the top 175 leaders at the corporate level. Embedded as a must in the DE&I strategic plan was hiring a chief diversity officer. To my surprise, I was offered the role. I began by leading 4,700 corporate employees before expanding the work throughout the 82,000-employee system.

Mass General Brigham has evolved from an organization that had a difficult time incorporating the word *diversity* into its lexicon to now talking about racism and antiracism. This seven-year journey started with a couple of dozen employees attending events organized by the office of DE&I. Today, thousands of employees support and regularly attend DE&I-related events throughout the year.

One in particular, the Annual Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Summit, is now a revered event going on its fifth year. The summit brings together a diverse array of employees from across the system for open and honest learning experiences. In May, we had an all-star cast of speakers sharing their views on "Understanding and Dismantling Systemic Racism: A Path Forward." Over 4,200 people attended.

Last year, Mass General Brigham developed its United Against Racism strategy, which included hiring goals for the first time in company history; education for all 82,000 employees; an incident-reporting platform where anyone can report mistreatment of any kind; and increased diversity on 26 boards across 16 institutions. United Against Racism is becoming embedded in all that MGB does, from clinical practices to community health efforts.

IN: What is your definition of the role of chief diversity officer?

DM: A chief diversity officer's role today is complex and multidimensional, requiring various skills. It is more expansive than diverse hiring. For example,

at Mass General Brigham, I helped design inclusive primary care facilities around the state, focusing on issues from gender-neutral bathrooms and access for people with disabilities to finding the most welcoming color palettes for often-anxious MGB patients.

Here is another example: One of the first gender identity-gender expression policies in Massachusetts came about because an employee who transitioned in her personal life walked into my office and said she still felt challenged with being her "real self" at work. Together, we found a path forward for her and distinguished Mass General Brigham as a leader in the LGBTQ community in Boston.

IN: What are some thought leader trends in DEI?

DM: We live in a complex world in which our personal and work lives are fully integrated and impact each other. Bringing our whole selves to work means seeing every person for all each represents, not just a worker performing a role. Social justice issues, including Black Lives Matter, immigration, health disparities illuminated by COVID, and remote working, are some of the trends surfacing in the DE&I world. Bringing one's whole self to work has a different definition than it did two years ago. Employees demand that their personal lives and the social context in which they live be discussed and addressed at work. No longer can employers say work and personal lives are separate. We live in a world where 24/7 news and social media require 24/7 corporate responsibility. We cannot ignore the events of the day and act like they don't impact our employees.

There is no playbook for a CDO on how to navigate these new waters. We must define appropriate action, words, and climate during times of crisis. When George Floyd was murdered, we snapped into a rapid-response mode, creating town halls to help navigate unprecedented times. We designed tool kits on how to have effective cross-race communications while conducting moments of silence at all 16 institutions to honor the time. Today's challenges focus on discussing where we go from here. How do we seize the momentum? And how do we identify and prepare for the challenge that has yet to emerge? **IN**