

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION
HALL OF FAME

THE CASE FOR DEI
INITIATIVES IN LAW FIRMS

NATIVE AMERICAN
EMPLOYEES WANT TO BE SEEN

INCLUSION

*Creating Globally
Inclusive & Culturally
Competent
Workplaces*

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DOLLAR GENERAL'S

DR. JOHNNÉ BATTLE

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

\$7.99US





Dr. Johné Battle

**Senior Vice President,
Chief Diversity Officer,
Dollar General**

Dr. Johné Battle is a renowned global business executive and thought leader who brings to his work the powerful combination of skillful talent development and human-capital expertise. His deep understanding of human relations, personal branding, diversity, equity, inclusion, and organizational performance has led to a successful track record of business transformation and human-capital counseling.

Dr. Battle is the founding partner and CEO of The Greatness Factory, and the senior vice president and chief diversity officer for Dollar General Corporation, a \$38 billion-plus retailer with more than 19,000 convenient, easy-to-shop stores in 47 states. Dr. Battle owns the strategy for diversity, equity, and inclusion for over 165,000 employees, and works across the organization using belonging indexes, talent-flow analysis, inclusive leader assessments, and other information to make data-based decisions. Prior to joining Dollar General, he was a senior client partner at Korn Ferry, where he led clients through large-scale cultural transformation and assisted with holistic DEI leadership development, employee

engagement, and employee branding efforts that enabled clients to attract, develop, and retain their talent while meeting business goals.

Dr. Battle received his doctorate in work-based learning leadership from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. He also earned a master of education in learning leadership from the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education, a master of business administration in organizational behavior from Emory University Goizueta Business School, and a bachelor of applied science in organizational leadership from Mercer University.

Inclusion: As offices return to the traditional in-person model, how can organizations best balance the differing needs of employees while maximizing camaraderie and effectiveness?

Johné Battle: The talent landscape is so different today, due to the Great Resignation phenomenon, that organizations must shift to a more purpose-driven focus on how we attract, develop, and advance talent throughout the enterprise. We must create a workplace by design that allows for flexibility in how we bring units together to share in those important in-person summits, and when and how we allow for hybrid day-to-day interactions. Even business-critical all-hands-on-deck initiatives still require a balanced hybrid approach in today's workplace.

IN: What do you think companies should be prioritizing in 2023 that has not been given enough attention in recent years?

JB: Companies that are not prioritizing social mobility in their IDEA [inclusion, diversity, equity, and access] strategies are missing a critical variable in their inclusion journey. There has been a significant focus on this in the UK, but not enough focus in the US when looking through the lens of diversity and inclusion.

When we think about inclusion through the lens of social mobility in organizations, the research is clear on the impact this variable has on organizational success. Research has shown that people in the workplace who come from lower social-class origins in the United States are 32 percent less likely to become managers than people who come from higher social-class



origins. What organizations fail to realize is that this disadvantage is even greater than the one experienced by women compared with men [27 percent] or Black people compared with white [25 percent].

Most organizations' measurements of their DE&I success stop with measurements around gender and ethnically diverse talent metrics. These are important variables, but social-class disadvantage is prevalent in the workplace in every major economy throughout the world. Yet many D&I leaders don't have it on their scorecards, and if we are in fact discriminating against people who come from a lower social class, we are grossly failing by default to design an inclusive workplace for most of the workforce.

IN: In 2021, many companies began to put more energy and priority on belonging, equity, and, in some cases, the support of social change and social justice in the community. What are some of the changes you have witnessed, and do you see that energy continuing?

JB: Social justice was and continues to be a critical driver to the work we do in the DE&I Center of Excellence at Dollar General. What we didn't want was to be prisoners of the moment, following the path of just writing a check and getting some goodwill out of it. Instead, our focus was on how we could strategically partner with the right organizations. We took a three-pronged approach, starting with how to break the cycle of social injustice, which led to our partnership with the Equal Justice Initiative and the great work that attorney Bryan Stevenson does to help those who have been wrongly incarcerated. Our second step was the intentional partnership with John Hope Bryant and Operation Hope. We felt that one of the critical areas of opportunity was around fiscal literacy, and the Hope Foundation has full-time financial advisors who help our frontline employees and people in our communities with everything from how to improve their credit scores to purchasing a home free of charge.

Our third partnership is with INROADS, an organization dedicated to underrepresented talent that is working with Dollar General to create intentional career pathways for diverse college students by offering



mentoring and internships that lead to potential early career opportunities.

I honestly don't see this effort by organizations slowing down anytime soon. The grassroots movements that we see stoking the flames of change remind me of the importance of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s quote during the March on Washington on the fierce urgency of now. Organizations today are pressed to continue playing a role in the fight and support of social change that can only come through social justice.

IN: Equity is now taking center stage over diversity and even inclusion. How can an organization best ensure equity?

JB: It's simple. Create a fair and equitable framework for development that outlines how "everybody matters." I am not simply talking about the "hi po's" [high-potential employees]. I am also talking about the "hi pros" [high professionals] and the "pros" already in position as well. You can't have true equity unless you have an approach to developing talent that shows that all talent matters—and development, a learnable skill set, is the key and must be differentiated in its approach, because one size does not fit all.

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

JB: I grew up in the SWATS ... Southwest Atlanta Too Strong! I was blessed to be the son of parents who were civil-rights foot soldiers. My father was Rev. Dr. Noel Battle, a march organizer for Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who sits in the prestigious Morehouse College Preachers' Preacher Ring of Honor. My mother

"Social justice was and continues to be a critical driver to the work we do in the DE&I Center of Excellence at Dollar General. What we didn't want was to be prisoners of the moment, following the path of just writing a check and getting some goodwill out of it."

IN: How do you use data and metrics to measure DEI success?

JB: Everything I do starts with a data-based decision. I want to have both quantitative and qualitative data that allow me to articulate the business case for where we want to go. Without data, I can't speak the language of business-to-business folk, because what gets measured is what gets done, but what gets measured with feedback is what gets done well. So for me, that all begins with a talent-flow analysis where I can see data that shows who was hired for positions across the enterprise in the last five years and at what rate, who exited the enterprise and at what rate, and who was promoted throughout the enterprise and at what rate. My qualitative work must be driven by focus groups that represent every dimension of diversity throughout the enterprise, from our women to our members of the LGBTQIA+ community. From there I can see where the gaps are in the experiences different people are having, and then solution design can take place. **IN**

is Mrs. Martha Hall Battle, and her servant leadership started during the civil rights era, when she was a secretary for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Both my parents were a part of the first F.W. Woolworth lunch-counter sit-ins.

I share this bit of my background not to impress you, but instead to impress upon you that I am standing on the shoulders of giants today. It is the work of all those who have gone before me that drives me to live a life of servant leadership.

IN: Tell us about your greatest success story—and the greatest challenge you are currently facing.

JB: One of my greatest professional success stories is in the work that we are currently doing at Dollar General to build an intentional, inclusive workplace where everyone can feel valued, respected, and supported. The innovation driving how we connect underrepresented people across all three verticals at the director level with senior executives responsible for the development of director-level associates is breaking structural barriers that existed prior to doing that work. The greatest challenge I face is knowing as a seasoned practitioner that everyone will publicly say they are for creating an inclusive workplace. But the reality is that I must privately negotiate paths along the way, and my negotiations look different every day depending upon the leader sitting across from me.