

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION
HALL OF FAME

THE CASE FOR DEI
INITIATIVES IN LAW FIRMS

NATIVE AMERICAN
EMPLOYEES WANT TO BE SEEN

INCUSION

*Creating Globally
Inclusive & Culturally
Competent
Workplaces*

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+ ISSUE 8

PINTEREST'S

Nichole Barnes Marshall

Leading the Charge on
Implementing Inclusive
and Equitable Practices

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Nichole Barnes Marshall

Global Head of
Inclusion and Diversity,
Pinterest

Nichole Barnes Marshall is the global head of Inclusion and Diversity (I&D) at Pinterest. In this role, she leads Pinterest's I&D team and strategy, integrates I&D principles into the company's people and business processes, and serves as a key partner to Bill Ready, CEO at Pinterest. Barnes Marshall joined Pinterest in January 2022 after serving as the chief diversity, equity, and inclusion officer at Bath & Body Works, where she was responsible for leading the cultural transformation

of the brand through the integration of DEI programs and efforts across the company.

Barnes Marshall has more than 20 years of experience in DEI and recruitment at such iconic brands as L Brands, Aon, and IBM, and remains active in the community on issues including social justice, educational access, and economic opportunity. She also serves on the boards of the Columbus Urban League, African American Leadership Academy, OIC of America, and United Way of Central Ohio.

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

Nichole Barnes Marshall: I see diversity, equity, and inclusion as interrelated and interdependent. Equity and inclusion without diversity [are] an echo chamber of homogeneity; diversity and equity without inclusion will not yield the mix of people or fairness to make it a reality; and you can’t have equity without diversity and inclusion because you won’t have the culture for fairness to thrive. So organizations must focus on how each of these areas supports one another and work to foster an overall sense of belonging by encouraging behaviors that create a welcoming environment for everyone.

Additionally, equity often gets confused with equality. Many only focus on equality because it emphasizes sameness. I’ve heard many managers say, “I treat everyone the same; I don’t give preferential treatment.” While this is a noble effort, it only gives an illusion of meritocracy. The reality is that people have unique experiences and needs that may put them at different starting points. Equity is what allows organizations to recognize these gaps and differences, to ensure the processes they have in place are fair, and gives everyone access to the same opportunities. No one should miss out on getting the apple on the tree because they are not tall enough or don’t have the support to reach it. Equality and equity should work hand in hand.

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?

NBM: As a child and native of Chicago, I looked up to Harold Washington, the first Black mayor of the city. He inspired me to go into politics to help others and make a difference in my community, especially for those who looked like me and had to struggle through adversity. So I studied and earned my degree in political science at Western Illinois University with the ultimate goal of becoming the mayor of Chicago or even the governor of Illinois.

Once I graduated, however, I had an opportunity to be a recruiter for my alma mater and share my experiences to help attract prospective students to the university. I fell in love with connecting and engaging with people. I went on to recruit for IBM and later landed at the *Chicago Tribune*. It was there that I worked with my first DEI leader, who noticed I had a knack for bringing diverse talent into the company, and for the first time, a diversity recruiter role was created for me. My experience as the only woman or Black person on my teams often translated into forming

fruitful relationships with diverse talent who brought immense value to the company.

From there, I held several other DEI, program management, and community affairs positions, eventually ascending to global chief diversity officer roles. Through my work in recruiting and DEI, I’ve been able to do exactly what I had hoped to do in politics, and that’s make a difference in people’s lives by creating inclusive workplaces and being a conduit to opportunity.

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

NBM: When I think about my professional success, I am most proud of the talent I’ve helped to develop over the years and the positive difference I’ve been able to make in people’s lives and career trajectories. I’ve introduced numerous professionals to the DEI field and have cultivated several professionals who are now leading, consulting, and working full-time in DEI roles. In my personal life, my greatest success is my family—my husband and three children—as well as the work I do on boards and community organizations to give back and help advance women, youth, and people of color.

As for challenges, one of the biggest opportunities I’m focused on right now is broadening the awareness of DEI as a shared responsibility to build trust, credibility, and connectivity. Everyone from individual contributors to leadership has a critical role to play in fostering a more diverse and inclusive culture. There’s often an unintentional box-checking mentality that says, “We have a

diversity and inclusion leader, so we're good," but we're all stakeholders in this work, including those who are not part of traditionally marginalized communities. It will be uncomfortable at times, but we have to lean into the discomfort to make things better.

IN: What will be some of the most pressing issues and challenges in the coming years for corporate diversity and inclusion leaders like yourself?

NBM: One issue that I care about a lot and have been focused on personally is the need to define and build the skills and competencies of an effective DEI leader. Over the last two years, there's been a proliferation of DEI roles and expansions of DEI teams where many professionals have come into this work because they have a passion for it, they've been "voluntold" to do it, or there's an assumption that since they are a woman or person of color, they can easily take on the work because of their identity.

Organizations and leaders are quickly learning that DEI is, and must be recognized as, a discipline with required skills, competencies, and experience. You wouldn't just put anyone into a chief marketing officer or general counsel role, and you shouldn't do that for senior DEI roles either. There's an assumption that identity and passion are enough to qualify you as a DEI leader, but there's so much more to the job.

It's important to cultivate the next generation of DEI leadership as strong practitioners who value the body of DEI work as a discipline. I never call it the "DEI space"—that's amorphous; you wouldn't say the "medical space," you'd say the medical field because it's a field of study. So I'm seeking to bring that same credibility to DEI.

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

NBM: I see COVID-19 as the convergence of three pandemics: (1) the public health pandemic that has exposed the inequities in health care and health outcomes, particularly for communities of color; (2) the economic pandemic that has negatively and disproportionately impacted people of color and women;

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and (3) the social justice pandemic that has underscored the real sense of crisis that marginalized groups face in their ability just to live and feel safe—from what's happening in Texas and Florida with the trans community to the strained relationship between Black people and law enforcement to the #StopAsianHate movement.

This convergence has fundamentally changed the way I go about my work in DEI. I lead with so much more intention and am unapologetic about moving past the need to justify why we have to do it. Leading with an intentional mindset is essential to the health, vibrancy, and sustainability of an inclusive company culture.

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

NBM: I think about it this way: if DEI is a body, then data and metrics are the lungs. Data breathes life into an organization's DEI efforts and reflects the impact and health of the initiatives and programs put into place.

I firmly believe that a data-driven, fact-based approach to sharing DEI success is critical for helping stakeholders know that you aren't just providing lip service.

At Pinterest, data shows that our work in DEI is not performative. We tell our DEI data story through our annual I&D report and are able to share how our efforts are having a tangible impact on representation, promotion, retention, engagement, and our overall business outcomes and platform innovation. We're by no means perfect, but I'll take consistent progress over perfection any day.

IN: In the last year, with so much happening in the world and country that impacted all of us, how did you help your organization and team deal with the fatigue and sense of being overwhelmed by the scope and speed of the work required to increase equity at Pinterest?

NBM: First, let me say, the fatigue is real. There is so much violence and mayhem showing up on our TVs, in our news feeds, and in our physical environments—and it's a lot to process. At Pinterest, we kicked off Pinclusion Discussions, a quarterly forum to bring everyone together with the goal of building proximity and collectively acknowledging the weight and trauma we're all carrying around as we navigate what's going on in the world today. The forum is meant not only to provide support, care, and visibility for our employees, but also to create a culture of sharing and community. These discussions help us refocus and remember our "why," which is to create a culture where our Pinemployees [Pinterest employees] thrive through representation and belonging. **IN**