

AI: CHALLENGE  
OR OPPORTUNITY?

SUPPORTING TRANSGENDER  
EMPLOYEES IN THE WORKPLACE

KEEPING DEI  
FRONT AND CENTER

# INCLUSION

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+ ISSUE 9

*Creating Globally  
Inclusive &  
Culturally  
Competent  
Workplaces*

**Doubling  
down on their  
commitment**

GOOGLE'S

**Valeisha  
Butterfield**

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# Valeisha Butterfield

## Vice President of Partnerships and Engagement Google LLC

**V**aleisha Butterfield is an influential, award-winning global business leader driving impact at the junctions of technology, entertainment, and politics.

In her role at Google, she builds strategies for some of the world's most recognizable brands. Passionate about bringing more diversity into the tech world, she has also accelerated DEI innovation for the global organization.

Prior to joining Google, Butterfield served on the Obama for America campaign as the national youth vote director, helping to deliver one of the highest youth voter turnouts in US history.

She also served as the first-ever copresident and chief diversity, equity, and inclusion officer for the Recording Academy, home of the Grammys. With Butterfield at the helm, the Grammys became the first major awards show to use an inclusion rider, resulting in three consecutive Grammy Awards shows, telecast on CBS, that were the most inclusive in the organization's 64-year history, while boosting its digital ratings growth. She also helped the organization implement its racial equity commitments, with a 100 percent completion rate, and establish the Black Music Collective.

Butterfield previously worked at Google as its global head of Inclusion and also worked in the Obama Administration as deputy director of public affairs for international trade.

She has been recognized by *Forbes*, *Billboard*, and *Essence*, and in the *Ebony* Power 100 and *Elle* magazine's Top 25 Leading Women, among other honors. Butterfield attended Clark Atlanta University and cofounded the Women in Entertainment Empowerment Network. She is also a mom.

### **Inclusion:** What brought you to do this work?

**Valeisha Butterfield:** Though I didn't know it at the time, my upbringing played a critical role in guiding me to the career path that I am on today. I grew up in Wilson, North Carolina, a small town literally and figuratively split by a train track. I learned from an early age that for many, the difference that shaped one's future was not a lack of talent but instead a lack of resources and access to opportunities.

In many ways, it was this fundamental lesson that shaped how I have approached every aspect of my career. Along my career journey—whether it be working for the Obama administration, the Recording Academy, or Google—I have found that in order to drive real change, we must work toward access and equity that can elevate communities and ensure that those communities have equitable opportunities to showcase their talent.

**IN: Tell us about your greatest success story and your greatest challenge.**

**VB:** While I have been blessed to work with inspiring colleagues and some of the most influential brands in the world, I can say that the achievement I am most proud of is being a mother to my two incredible sons. Every opportunity I have to take a stage, launch an initiative, or give voice to an issue, I think about how I am creating a new pathway not only for my children but for the next generation. As I get older, the responsibility of building a world where my Black sons have more opportunity and examples than I had growing up becomes more and more central to my purpose and career.

The greatest challenge I'm currently facing is actually taking the time to acknowledge my own achievements. So often we're concerned about the next deliverable, the next milestone, the next win. The more senior you become in your career, the more you focus on the future. I have been pushing myself to pause, be present in the moment, and acknowledge all the small wins along the way too.

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

**VB:** We are truly at an inflection point within the DEI space. While there is no shortage of external voices questioning the value of the work, practitioners are laser focused on how the work continues to evolve to meet the demands of an ever-changing social, business, and political landscape. As the work continues to evolve, I have been encouraged by the industry's move to an environment where principles of inclusion



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and belonging are no longer relegated to one-off initiatives. We're seeing those principles being integrated into the fabric of organizational policies, training, and best practices.

For example, at Google, when we talk about product inclusion, we are not simply looking at the final product to determine if it is inclusive. Instead, from inception, a user-first approach is applied throughout every stage of design and development to ensure an inclusive design paradigm is adopted to address user needs across many dimensions of identity. It is through the integration of inclusion principles across an organization's systems that we can take a more critical look at the effectiveness of our DEI efforts as well as the overall commitment of the organization's mission of building an environment where all employees can thrive.

**IN: What do you see as the challenges and opportunities posed by gen Z?**

**VB:** Each generation is faced with the same challenge: how to leverage the lessons of the past while charting its own path toward the future. Gen Z is no different. I have been inspired by gen Z's willingness to lean into change. At a time when we are seeing industries rapidly changing in reaction to technological shifts, changes in climate, and evolving business realities, I believe that gen Z's affinity for disruption will put them at the forefront of leading organizations into the future.

In terms of challenges facing gen Z, I believe that the ultimate responsibility resides with the generations before them who currently sit in positions of power to have the courage to look holistically at what gen Z uniquely brings to the table and enable our organizations to leverage those strengths. If we truly care about building workplaces where everyone belongs, we must understand that progress is inextricably linked to change, and that change must be reflective of the experiences across the generational spectrum.

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

**VB:** I believe in the power of storytelling. Data plays a fundamental role in effectively telling any story. When looking at any inclusion issue, I use data to help contextualize the experiences that individuals and communities have within a system or organization.

Oftentimes, we can feel when something is broken within a space, but it is through the collection of data that we are able to evaluate the depth



Butterfield in conversation with DJ, producer, and cultural catalyst Derrick “D-Nice” Jones at the 2023 Cannes Lion Festival.

and breadth of the issue. With this in mind, I guide my teams to first listen to and center the feedback of communities they are tasked with serving, and then evaluate which metrics most directly correspond to the issues the communities are facing. It is only when we have a clear understanding of the issues and relevant data points that we can consider going into the ideation and design phase of support.

Maintaining a data-driven approach is critical not only in the design of DEI interventions but also in reaffirming the business imperative for DEI. While there have been countless studies highlighting the financial benefits of having diverse and inclusive organizations, it is the duty of every DEI practitioner to ensure that all stakeholders have a clear understanding of how internal DEI strategy directly connects to their organization’s near- and long-term goals. Going beyond representation, attrition, and retention, it is critical to understand what metrics are key to the organization and its leaders and where your inclusion efforts intersect.

**IN: Describe Google’s commitment to sharing DEI data and what has been the impact of that.**

**VB:** Google’s mission is to organize the world’s information and make it universally useful and accessible. This mission is reflected throughout the company and is particularly pertinent in our approach to DEI data. Before collecting data from our Googler community, we share clear guidelines for the collection of data as well as how the data will be expressly used.

In 2019, we launched the Self-ID global census, a voluntary employee demographic data collection effort. Our goal is to build a multifunctional dataset to better understand who we are as a company and to inform the priorities, programs, and products that create a more inclusive Google. Self-ID is already making an impact internally and across the industry. For example, the Self-ID dataset has supported the creation of tailored

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learning resources as well as expansion of programming to more locations and communities.

**IN: How is Google supporting gender identity and expression in the workplace?**

**VB:** Creating an inclusive culture where everyone feels welcomed, respected, valued, and supported is central to Google’s DEI goals. This is particularly important as we look to build an inclusive environment for Googlers across the spectrum of gender identity and expression. Going back to the importance of centering the voices and experiences of the communities you look to serve, we have worked to

take a “One Google” approach in all of the spaces where our Googlers engage. From the cultivation of community via our employee resource groups and physical investment in offices with increased access to lactation rooms and gender-neutral bathrooms to integration of optional pronoun functionality into our internal systems of tools, we have tried to ensure that every Googler feels that they belong and that they experience the workplace at parity.

We’ve made remarkable progress in this space, but it is important to note that there is more work to be done. As a global company, we realize that the experiences of employees can vary greatly across regions and intersections of identity. In recognition of this, we consistently work to develop resources that are not only regionally relevant but are also reflective of the intersectional spectrum that makes our community so unique. We know that a one-size-fits-all approach often fails to meet the needs of those most marginalized. We’ll continue to build innovative solutions that create richer experiences of belonging for everyone. **IN**