

AI: CHALLENGE  
OR OPPORTUNITY?

SUPPORTING TRANSGENDER  
EMPLOYEES IN THE WORKPLACE

KEEPING DEI  
FRONT AND CENTER

# INCLUSION

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*Creating Globally  
Inclusive &  
Culturally  
Competent  
Workplaces*

ALLIANT'S

## Dr. Denise L. Caleb

Leading the  
Charge on  
Implementing  
Inclusive and  
Equitable  
Practices



# Dr. Denise L. Caleb

First Vice President, Director of Human Capital Consulting, **Alliant**

**D**enise L. Caleb is one of the country's leading experts on diversity, equity, and inclusion. A chief HR officer

twice, she has more than 25 years of experience in human resources, business development, and executive leadership roles. Dr. Caleb is focused on innovating and leading human capital strategies to enhance DEI capabilities at consulting firm Alliant.

Prior to her role with Alliant, Dr. Caleb was the inaugural president of Human Resource Standards Institute (HRSI) and senior vice president of global diversity and inclusion external strategy at Human Resources Certification Institute (HRCI), providing and advancing the organization's strategic expansion and multi-sector growth.

Dr. Caleb has supported numerous Fortune 500 organizations, including Walgreens; Ford Motor Credit Company, the financial arm of the Ford Motor Company; Education Management Corporation, under the Goldman Sachs umbrella; San Juan Regional Medical Center; and the University of Kansas Health System, serving on a total of eight executive teams. In addition to the health system's HR, she was responsible for employee health, occupational health, and urgent care, which had more than 30,000 visits per year. While in higher education, she provided HR leadership for 13 campus locations and Western State College of Law in California. Dr. Caleb, who currently serves on the Rockies Venture Club board, is also a military spouse of 27 years.

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**Inclusion:** What should companies be prioritizing in 2024 that has not been given enough attention in recent years?

**Denise Caleb:** The prioritization of the employee value proposition (EVP) is at the top of my list, because it merges purpose, inclusion, belonging, and engagement into one critical set of work that I believe to be at the cusp of organizational success or failure. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we started to see a shift in employees wanting more from their work-life relationship with their employer. Many would refer to this as an individual purpose. When people had an opportunity to sit back, slow down, and process their lives, many of us decided we wanted and deserved more. This was when aligning purpose and values to the organization became much more critical.

Fast-forward to the current VUCA [volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous] times that we are navigating, with different types and levels of uncertainty. Employees are still longing for alignment, balance, or what I refer to as a positive blend of work-life integration. Developing a well-crafted EVP can make the organization's success sustainable and progressive growth possible. When it's done right, I refer to the EVP as an integral component of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. It can create this hire-to-retire mentality, where the employee who is treated well and allowed to share their authenticity sees themselves as contributing to the organization and sees their value come to fruition.

Since I was a little girl, I have wanted to work with and be tied to an organization that values my talents and unique personality. When an organization designs an attractive EVP, the employer brand is elevated and recognized by the employee population, managers, leaders, and the community. Each day, I feel fortunate that, through our work at Alliant, I can partner with and bring this type of service to the market to expedite organizational solutions, resulting in desired outcomes for our clients.

**“DEI practitioners can push their shoulders back, stick their chests out, and hold their heads high knowing that this work matters. Each day, we have the opportunity to positively influence the workforce and workplace through the work of DEI.”**

**IN:** In 2022, increasingly, many companies began pulling back from their commitment to DEI. How can DEI practitioners combat that retreat and convince their companies of the value of continuing, even expanding, that investment?

**DC:** The retreat and departure from DEI are not uncommon. Since the beginning of DEI work, the peaks and valleys, the highs and lows have been prevalent. This is what drives the necessity for resiliency. As DEI practitioners, strategists, and leaders, we must stay the course. There will continue to be influences in this field of work that impact the level of engagement and commitment we can drive among certain leaders and workplaces. My philosophy has been to remain attentive to the individuals who want to do the work to drive business outcomes and employee experiences.

DEI practitioners can push their shoulders back, stick their chests out, and hold

their heads high knowing that this work matters. Each day, we have the opportunity to positively influence the workforce and workplace through the work of DEI. We can continue and should continue to cast a wide net to bring people along the DEI journey. Those who do not come along should not be forced or given an overabundance of our time. When doing DEI work, we must be protective of our time, mindful of how we leverage our talents, and prideful of exercising our treasures. Working overtime to convince those who are not aligned with the philosophy of the work can be inefficient.

Here are three ways that I recommended utilizing DEI practitioners to provide an introductory foundation to the investment of DEI:

**Introspection** | Know yourself, your purpose, intersections, and the story you want to contribute to the work. People want to learn from vulnerable, candid, and real people. Knowing yourself and how you can positively impact others is the only way.

**Influence** | Build a compelling business case that leans into the value, research, and outcomes to influence deeper understanding and engagement with DEI.

**Resiliency** | Having the right allies around you is critical. This is hard work, and when your DEI practitioners do not have the right mentor, coach, or sponsors around them, they will be at risk of burnout and turnover.

**IN:** What brought you to do this work? Is there a story from your childhood that inspired you in this direction?

**DC:** During second grade, when my class was preparing to go out for recess, my teacher attempted to have everyone line up in some orderly



fashion. She asked us to form two lines. As kids shuffled around and would not stay still, she said both lines were not doing well enough to be dismissed. She took her finger and pointed to the leader of each line. She looked at me and said, “Eenie, meenie, miny, moe, catch an ‘N’ by its toe.”

For a moment, I felt like I froze and could not move.

It was one of those times, of many, that you don’t forget, and you can remember when the event took place and what you were doing, such as the beating of Rodney King, the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the killing of George Floyd. In our lifetimes, we’ve all had a moment when we’ve paused and said, What happened?

At seven years old, I did not understand the impact and magnitude of the incident, aside from the fact that it felt inherently wrong. I knew it was a feeling I did not want to experience again.

This childhood memory is one of many that have lasted and made me want to ensure equity and justice through my HR career and DEI work, where there is inclusion and belonging for all within the workplace. Throughout my career, it has been my goal to create spaces where no one feels that ache in the pit of their stomach or a moment in time that never dissipates.

That is why I do the work, to invent outcomes that allow employees to feel a sense of safety, celebration, and inclusion, allowing their purpose to be utilized. From early in my career, I have known, no matter

what my role has been in the organization: I am responsible for the work of DEI.

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

**DC:** Data is critical and valuable if you measure what matters to the workforce and the community. The mirror effect continues to be a starting point for evaluating underrepresentation, which is vital for reaching representation. When employees live and work in an environment where their employment and that of others do not mirror the community in which they live, the goal of representation remains unanswered.

**IN: In the last few years, with so much happening in the world and country that impacted all of us, how can organizations and teams deal with the fatigue and sense of being overwhelmed by the scope and speed of the work required to increase equity in the organization?**

**DC:** Brilliant question without an easy solution, and no one approach will work for all. In the simplest of terms, so many of us are striving for balance. My resolve years ago was to embrace what I refer to as “work-life integration.”

I have operated in a state of work-life integration for nearly 25 years, meaning my personal and professional lives have been tightly woven. My family, friends, and colleagues all know a little about critical aspects of my life. I also have interpreted my roles with a blended mindset of what looks right for my lifestyle. It works for me! At least, I think it has.

I hope my career philosophy has the outcomes I had expected as a working professional and parent. It was a tough decision, and I am attempting to navigate work-life integration without regrets.

With so much work and the rapid rate at which work must be completed, we must rely on efficiency tools and find peace with what does and does not work. How you approach the abundance of the work, and the rate of speed at which you need to complete the work, must become a personal choice that works for you and your family. **IN**