

AI: CHALLENGE  
OR OPPORTUNITY?

SUPPORTING TRANSGENDER  
EMPLOYEES IN THE WORKPLACE

KEEPING DEI  
FRONT AND CENTER

# INCLUSION

WINTER 2024 + ISSUE 9

*Creating Globally Inclusive & Culturally Competent Workplaces*



AMAZON'S **Candi  
Castleberry**  
& the Inclusive  
Experiences and  
Technology Team



## Leading the Charge on Implementing Inclusive and Equitable Practices

From top left: **Candi Castleberry**, Vice President, Inclusive eXperiences and Technology (IXT); **Angel Enriquez**, Director IXT Employee Experience; **LaDavia Drane**, Director IXT Communities; **Melanie Harrington**, Director IXT External Strategies Team; **Amy Hanscom**, Director IXT Strategy and Business Operations; **Michelle Witherspoon**, Director IXT Central Services Team; **Kathryn Whyte-Southcombe**, Director IXT Inclusive Experience; **Modupe' Congleton**, Director Global Engagement Team.



# Candi Castleberry

Vice President, Inclusive eXperiences and Technology (IXT) **Amazon**

**A**s Amazon's vice president of Inclusive eXperiences and Technology (formerly Global Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion), and a member of the senior leadership team, Candi Castleberry is focused on leveraging science and technology to drive systemic change in DEI. A visionary change agent with two decades of experience in helping organizations move "from bolted-on to built-in" diversity, Castleberry is leading the integration of DEI throughout the employee, customer, and community experience at Amazon.

Prior to joining the company, Castleberry was vice president of Intersectionality, Culture, and Diversity at X (formerly Twitter). She is also the founder of the award-winning Dignity & Respect Campaign, which helps organizations create environments that nurture cultural awareness and community unity. As an experienced diversity and inclusion leader, she developed successful strategies and initiatives in technology, telecommunications, and health-care companies, including Xerox Corporation, Sun Microsystems, Motorola, and health-care provider and insurer University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC).



**“AI can have tremendous upside for DEI. It can accelerate relationship building, upskill, and scale in a way otherwise impossible. At the same time, we can influence this technology so that it helps, not harms.”**

Castleberry’s business acumen enhances her approach of partnering with senior executives, business process owners, and community leaders to build sustainable practices for the workplace and marketplace. She

has delivered inspiring keynotes and lectures all over the world, from Beijing to Budapest, and served as an adjunct professor at Carnegie Mellon University. She received an MBA from Pepperdine University and a bachelor’s degree in legal studies from University of California, Berkeley, and completed the Stanford University Executive Human Resources program.

**IN: You pioneered the concept of diversity as “bolted on” or “built in” nearly 20 years ago. Does this blueprint still apply today?**

**CC:** At Amazon, we have moved well beyond these two concepts to “born inclusive.” AI and machine learning are making this possible.

I began evolving DEI from “bolted on” to “built in” to “born inclusive.” Born inclusive integrates DEI into internal processes to empower employees and better ensure an inclusive work culture. Historically, and frequently to this day, most DEI initiatives tend to be bolted on—the product has already been built, and we sit a program on top of this existing system so that the results yield a desired outcome. The DEI initiative is bolted on, meaning it’s aftermarket—the product itself doesn’t yield the result without the complementary program.

In other cases, DEI initiatives are built in. For example, say the talent acquisition process is not yielding enough veterans. Instead of changing the hiring system, we tend to build a new process that offers a Band-Aid when what is necessary is addressing how the hiring system was built.

Given that it’s harder to fix something once it’s out there than it is to do it right the first time, these two approaches have limitations and are not scalable.

Today at Amazon, foundational to everything we do—every decision we make, every product—we strive for “born-inclusive” standards. This means that equity and inclusion are integrated from the beginning into the conception and execution of the architecture and design of the products we build. Throughout the company, the work of every person, every task, is done in collaboration with our science and technology teams to leverage AI and machine learning to enhance the employee and customer experience—not to fix a broken experience.

Because of our size, we are able to build customized products for both our employees and our customers. So, for example, when we build our own HR products, DEI is “born inclusive” into that product. The same goes for customer-facing products we create.

This technology is moving so fast that unless we act now, we’re not going to be a part of it. DEI leaders need to be involved every step of



the way—we must give input at every milestone, every checkpoint, as a product is being built. So we need to shift our resources to think about how we integrate DEI into the design to yield the outcomes we want.

Not only does this born-inclusive approach have significant implications today, it will have even greater implications tomorrow. As technology inevitably develops to a place where it will replace more and more human functions, it is imperative that we build products and systems that are inclusive and human centered.

This urgency is why we recently changed the name of our DEI team to Inclusive eXperiences and Technology (IXT). IXT will put into action and accelerate Amazon's creation of inclusive, accessible, and equitable experiences enabled through technology. This new name places our vision—and our approach for achieving it—in front of us at all times.

The lasting imprint this work will have on DEI and people's well-being for generations is the reason I am here at Amazon. This is the future of DEI, and I want to be in at the ground floor.

**IN: In the last few years, there's so much happening in the world and country that has had a profound impact on employees' well-being and effectiveness. How can organizations best support their employees, and in particular those with DEI roles?**

**CC:** Many of us have chosen to work in DEI not because it's a job but because it's a mission. Therefore, we have accepted that our work will often be hard, emotionally draining—and hopefully, fulfilling as well.

But in recent years, the scope of our job has changed drastically and made our work more challenging. As champions of employees across multiple demographic groups and intersectionalities, we are often asked to solve for rapid-fire, complicated, and overlapping global challenges that have deep and tangled roots, that even the experts for whom these conflicts are their lifework have been unable to resolve.

Today, DEI professionals need to be attuned to everything, 24/7. Most people, as they go about their day, tune in to the news maybe in the morning and at the end of the day. But we have

to continually be tuned in to all the struggles on every front—including societal conflicts around race, gender, and religion—all day, every day.

On top of that, for those of us who've been in this field for a long time, many of our friends also do this work, which means even on the weekends, we're still not able to turn off. For decades we have pushed through it, but now the order of magnitude is much greater, and the accumulation of the psychological impact of this work is piling up.

So, what is the solution? How do we take care of ourselves so we can continue to use our training and empathy to help others and have a material impact? If we are going to be healthy and effective DEI leaders, we need better work-life integration and access to mental health and wellness resources—and we need to use those resources and not just refer others to them. We need to first make sure our companies provide an adequate mental health support system, and then we must prioritize ourselves in this journey. The success of our work depends on it.

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

**CC:** This is a critical time for DEI, not just because of legislative headwinds or the complexities of competing narratives we are asked to solve, but because AI and machine learning are changing the way we work, learn, absorb content, research, write—you name it. We are at a unique inflection point, where technology is rapidly progressing in the midst of a changing political and economic landscape.

So many people are worried, for good reason, about the potential negative impact of AI. But I think we need to reframe the question from how can we defend our work and employees from this technology to how can we use AI to further our work?

This technology can have tremendous upside for DEI. We can use generative AI to accelerate relationship building, upskill, and scale in a way otherwise impossible. At the same time, we can influence this technology, so we benefit from the good it can create and avoid the pitfalls it may introduce. If done right, AI can reduce bias in humans, not accentuate it. It can inspire communities of color and increase accessibility.

The key is, we must be in on the ground floor as the technology is being developed and deployed into our companies' products and business models. At Amazon, given our unique position as a global tech leader, we have a huge responsibility—and a huge opportunity. We can lead the way in creating devices and services for our customers that are "born inclusive." That means that in the conception process, we're prioritizing how to optimize inclusion so that the product and service meet the needs of people across all stages of life, from people with disabilities who rely on technology to communities who benefit from easily customizable devices that provide multi-language options.

DEI teams are at a pivotal moment. We have the responsibility that comes with not just doing DEI work as we know it, but doing DEI work that influences the way the world will absorb content and build future technologies and products with AI. Let's embrace this moment. **IN**