

AI: CHALLENGE  
OR OPPORTUNITY?

SUPPORTING TRANSGENDER  
EMPLOYEES IN THE WORKPLACE

KEEPING DEI  
FRONT AND CENTER

# INCLUSION

*Creating Globally  
Inclusive &  
Culturally  
Competent  
Workplaces*

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VISA'S

## Michelle Gethers

Leading the Charge on Implementing  
Inclusive and Equitable Practices





# Michelle Gethers

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Visa



**M**ichelle Gethers leads Visa's global strategy for growth in inclusive and diverse talent, social impact and environmental sustainability, and philanthropy. Prior to joining Visa, Gethers served as the president and CEO at United Way of Greater Greensboro, North Carolina, where she and her team focused on partnerships to end poverty. She led business transformation and fundraising by galvanizing community leaders, businesses, and nonprofits. Gethers held a variety of roles over 21 years at American Express, including Senior Vice President and General Manager of Card Operations. In addition, she has experience as an entrepreneur with a consulting firm, as a certified public accountant, and as an author.

Gethers has served in positions with global leadership responsibility in the United States, Canada, the Philippines, and India. She leverages her corporate and social impact experiences to

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form strategies, operationalize solutions, convene stakeholders, innovate, and address root causes of business and societal problems.

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

**Michelle Gethers:** Every company has a unique culture and cadence for how priorities are set. I trust that, based on business objectives and employee engagement, FY24 will allow companies to achieve their goals and objectives. Addressing inclusion and diversity is a dynamic process. There are no "should" and "should not" priorities that I would call out. Instead, I would say that inclusion and diversity efforts require continuous prioritization and calibration to internal and external conditions. At Visa, our purpose is to uplift everyone everywhere by being the best way to pay and be paid. Accordingly, inclusion and diversity consider the collective needs of internal talent, external communities, and other



(left to right) Michelle Gethers at Visa's inaugural Black Scholars Summit in June 2022; speaking at Visa's Atlanta office opening ceremony; speaking to incoming interns at Visa's Black Scholars Summit in June 2023.

stakeholders aligned with our business priorities. Said another way, business goals and I&D goals are linked. At Visa, business and I&D goals support communities and local businesses through greater access to financial education, inclusion, digital enablement resources, and business development tools to help them succeed.

As Visa continues to grow, a strong local presence in the communities where we do meaningful business is critical, to deepen our I&D commitments by putting down roots where there's a pool of untapped diverse talent. For example, we recently opened our Atlanta office with the mission of expanding our commitment to I&D and providing new opportunities to a diverse pool of talent. Our newfound I&D commitments within Atlanta are helping to set this precedent of expanding outreach to communities through our continual private-public community-academic partnerships that foster equitable opportunities for Black entrepreneurs, support for local businesses, and programs that expand financial inclusion and access. Setting forth and upholding these commitments allows us as corporate leaders to ultimately create a more equitable society by continuing to implement initiatives that drive economic mobility, uplift communities of color, and reduce economic disparity at the local level. Through the ongoing prioritization at a localized scale, we are not only able to further the reach of our partnerships and investments but also pursue new opportunities that reinforce Visa's imperative to be a good corporate citizen for the communities where we live and work.

**"This next generation of employees entering the workforce are global thinkers, travelers, inventors, and innovators powered by technology. We must make room for this technically sophisticated generation."**

At the same time, we acknowledge that flexibility differs from person to person and team to team. Our workspace is conducive to interacting with colleagues and playing a game together. Simple things like beverages and snacks also add to an engaging experience. All these elements enrich how we work together to deliver business outcomes that benefit. We become more efficient and effective when we have strong working relationships with colleagues. The basis for most human relationships is being together and shared experiences. The future is bright as we consider the ongoing benefits of hybrid work.

**IN: As offices are returning to a hybrid work model, how can organizations best balance the differing needs of their employees while at the same time maximizing camaraderie and effectiveness?**

**MG:** Culture, culture, and culture. Company culture will be a driving force for remote, hybrid, and in-office work. We know that now more than ever, an employer must provide its employees with the support, flexibility, and resources they need to thrive. At Visa, we specifically designed our return-to-office plan to prioritize our employees and to create deeper client, partner, and colleague relationships while providing the space and flexibility our workforce needs. We've created dedicated employee assistance programs that routinely examine the ways in which we can ensure employees feel supported. We ask our employees to collaborate and have meaningful interactions with each other. We invite customers and clients into our offices.

**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?**





**MG:** I have no specific comment or insight into companies pulling back or retreating. I can say that strong strategies and action plans linked to business results allow for I&D to be a sought-after component of business investments. Leaders can establish an annual revisit of why they implemented their I&D practices and programs. This way, they are better able to reinforce the impact on the communities they set out to support and determine areas for growth and improvement. As a global company that does business in more than 200 countries and territories, much of our I&D efforts are rooted in the fact that our workforce is representative of the customers and clients we serve. We value the unique identities and contributions of our employees, and we are committed to cultivating an inclusive and diverse environment that supports the development and advancement of all. Because of this, we make data-driven decisions, have culture-based conversations, and support all aspects of individual identity. The value proposition of I&D on any business can be determined. Many studies exist, and internal data points can support the global and local market relevance. Our investment in creating a diverse and inclusive culture ensures all employees are given an opportunity to contribute to the fullest, because we know our best thinking, problem-solving, and creativity come from giving everyone a voice, and that people can only speak authentically when they bring their whole selves to work. Combining the narrative of employee and customer experiences with data-driven business outcomes can be an effective way for a company to determine if it should start, stop, do more, or do less.

**“The work of equity, inclusion, and diversity is ongoing and subject to change. The importance of strong metrics and communication plans cannot be underestimated in the journey.”**

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

**MG:** This next generation of employees entering the workforce are global thinkers, travelers, inventors, and innovators powered by technology. Several generations will be in the workplace learning and working together. As such, we must make room for this technically sophisticated generation. We know first-hand that this generation of doers is vibrant and ready to contribute through our various internship, scholarship, and new college graduate programs. Each summer, we get to work closely with students from around the world who want to contribute at a high level. We welcome them and learn from them. As an organization, we recognize that the speed that they work and expect action may be different than traditional business models, so it means we must be bold and fast. We are ready to make the necessary changes in our system, practices, and mindsets to be bold and fast. We also know that Gen Z wants maximum flexibility, and we must collaborate regularly to stay abreast of emerging trends. Gen Z introduces only upside to any business. We look forward to multiple generations working together at Visa for collective impact.

**IN: In the last few years, with so much happening in the world and country that impacted all of us, how do 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 in your organization?**

**MG:** Well-being and psychological safety are starting points for a world that has experienced once-in-a-lifetime events. The need for change and speed is unprecedented. At Visa, we anchor on our purpose and leadership principles to ensure we are aligned during every step of the business cycle. It means human-centered designs are considered for our customers, clients, and our talent. We are a network of networks powered by great people. Our culture and workplace designs offer space for individual reflection and flexibility. We do not rush our I&D process. Instead, we have thoughtful discussions to determine the next right action. We make decisions and we move forward in an inclusive manner. We align our people and investments in a way that makes the most measurable impact. We examine our progress at regular intervals so we can lift and shift if needed. The work of equity, inclusion, and diversity is ongoing and subject to change. The importance of strong metrics and communication plans cannot be underestimated in the journey. **IN**