

AI: CHALLENGE
OR OPPORTUNITY?

SUPPORTING TRANSGENDER
EMPLOYEES IN THE WORKPLACE

KEEPING DEI
FRONT AND CENTER

INCLUSION

*Creating Globally
Inclusive &
Culturally
Competent
Workplaces*

WINTER 2024
+ ISSUE 9

SYSCO'S

Adrienne Trimble

**Leading
the Charge
on Implementing
Inclusive and
Equitable Practices**





Adrienne Trimble

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Adrienne Trimble is an established thought leader for advancing corporate diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. She has led DEI and social impact initiatives for large, complex organizations nationally and globally. Trimble began her diversity and inclusion work at Toyota Motor North America, where she worked closely with the company's senior leadership team in developing advocacy and accountability measures to integrate DEI processes across the organization's business operations. She oversaw Toyota's Supplier Diversity initiative from 2005 to 2012. In this role, she grew the company's diverse supplier base to reflect an increase in spending that exceeded 300 percent. Trimble served, as an executive on loan, as the president and CEO for the National Minority Supplier Development Council from August 2018 to February 2021. Under her leadership, the organization grew both the number of corporate members and certified minority businesses and implemented a strategic plan for long-term organizational sustainability.

Inclusion: What impact do you expect the recent Supreme Court ruling on affirmative action to have on corporate DEI efforts, and what can DEI professionals do to prepare?

Adrienne Trimble: Although the Supreme Court ruling was focused on higher education, it has sparked robust discussion regarding the viability of corporate DEI initiatives. As those discussions unfold, it is essential for DEI professionals to remain proactive and adaptive in

their approach, staying attuned to changes in the legal landscape and evolving best practices in the field. DEI professionals can continue to focus on collecting and analyzing data to demonstrate the effectiveness of their strategies. This data can help organizations focus efforts on the most pressing DEI challenges and provide context on the impact the strategies can have on overall business outcomes.

Over the last few months, I've been fortunate to attend several chief diversity officer forums to discuss the current state of DEI initiatives and the path forward. Our discussions suggest that most companies are forging ahead with their planned strategies, albeit more cautiously. This is where communication strategies can be profoundly beneficial. We need to remind internal and external stakeholders of the basic inclusive principles of DEI strategies and the business case advantages. By going back to the fundamentals and aligning DEI efforts with broader business goals, practitioners can show the true economic and business benefit of DEI—regardless of the external challenges we might face.

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?

AT: As remote and in-office work continue to coexist, organizations can proactively nurture connections and ensure that all employees feel valued and included. Companies should develop clear policies and guidelines outlining how the hybrid work model will function, including expectations for attendance, communication, and performance. Effective communication is the linchpin of engagement. Organizations should prioritize establishing clear communication channels that accommodate both remote and in-office employees. Regular team meetings, video conferencing, and collaborative messaging platforms help bridge the physical gap.

Camaraderie fosters trust and positive working relationships among team members,

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whether they are working in the office or remotely. When employees feel connected and comfortable with their colleagues, they are more likely to collaborate effectively, share ideas, and work together seamlessly.

Within hybrid work environments, recognition programs become a unifying force that fosters positive morale, promotes a sense of belonging, and motivates employees to excel. They help create a workplace culture that values and appreciates the diverse contributions of all employees, contributing to a more engaged and satisfied workforce.

IN: In 2022, 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?

AT: In a world where diversity, equity, and inclusion are not only moral imperatives but also business necessities, DEI practitioners are the vanguards of change. Practitioners can stress

that DEI is not a fleeting trend, but a critical long-term strategy for the organization’s sustainability and growth. We must continually share the business case for DEI, positioning commitment to these principles as a driver of business success and a source of competitive advantage in the marketplace. By making a strong commitment to DEI, companies can greatly impact their customers and their employees as well as the communities they serve.

The demographics of the world are changing rapidly. Populations are becoming more diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, and more. DEI initiatives are essential to ensure that organizations accurately reflect the makeup of society and their customer base. At Sysco, we will continue to live our values and demonstrate that a diverse workforce is a stronger workforce. Our ultimate goal is to cultivate a workforce and customer base that match the demographics of the communities we serve.

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?

AT: In the early days of my career journey, my ambitions were clear: I aspired to be a civil rights attorney, passionately advocating for justice and equality in a courtroom. The notion of using the law as a powerful tool to champion the rights of the marginalized and disenfranchised had always been a driving force within me. Little did I know that my path would take a turn, leading me toward an entirely different arena where I would continue the fight for fairness and equity on a broader scale.

My initial foray into the world of human resources may have seemed like an unexpected detour from my original dream, but it turned out to

be a pivotal moment of self-discovery. As I immersed myself in the HR field, I quickly realized that it held immense potential for making a profound impact on people's lives, just as my initial career choice had promised.

The realization struck when I observed the director of HR in my organization, a remarkable individual whose actions and decisions resonated deeply with me.

I observed how my former director of HR was the catalyst for policies that shaped the work environment for every employee. Every personnel matter, every policy implementation, and every decision influenced the daily experiences of the workforce.

In my commitment to ensuring that company policies were not only equitable but also applied fairly across the board, I recognized that true equity meant recognizing and addressing the unique circumstances and challenges faced by each individual in the organization. I have always championed the cause of fairness, even when it meant challenging established norms or confronting difficult situations head-on.

This unwavering dedication to creating an equitable and inclusive workplace deeply resonated with me. I saw how DEI principles were not just about compliance, but about fostering an environment where every employee could thrive, regardless of their background, identity, or circumstances.

I realized that while my dream of becoming a civil rights attorney was noble, the world of HR offered me an opportunity to effect change on a broader canvas, impacting the lives of countless individuals within an organization.

As I look back on my journey, I am grateful for the unexpected twists and turns that have brought me to where I am today. My experiences have taught me that the pursuit of justice and equity can take many forms, and my role in HR has allowed me to make a meaningful difference in the lives of employees and the organizations I serve.

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

AT: My greatest success story unfolded when I assumed leadership of the NMSDC [National Minority Supplier Development Council] and advocated for thousands of minority-owned businesses during a global pandemic. It was a time of unprecedented challenges, but it also offered a unique opportunity to make a profound impact. Collaborating with members of Congress and influential business leaders, we tirelessly

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advocated for awareness of the critical issues faced by minority-owned businesses. Our goal was to secure the resources necessary to sustain these companies through the economic upheaval caused by the pandemic. It was a rewarding experience to witness the tangible results of our efforts, including special loans, funding, and vital resources that helped these businesses weather the storm.

It's clear that, despite significant efforts, the issues we set out to address years ago persist today. My ongoing challenge is to keep companies focused on these crucial strategies, helping them understand that DEI remains an urgent business imperative. We must continue to champion change, making sure DEI remains at the forefront of our corporate landscape, driving lasting transformation and inclusivity. In the face of efforts to undo progress in DEI, our determination to stay the course is a powerful statement of our values and commitment to a fair and equitable society. It demonstrates that we will not be swayed by temporary setbacks, but will continue working toward a future where diversity, equity, and inclusion are embraced as essential principles that drive positive change in our workplaces and communities.

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

AT: Always lead with the data. In the DEI space, leading with data isn't just best practice; it's an ethical imperative. It ensures that organizations aren't operating in the dark but are making informed decisions that drive tangible progress toward a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive future. By embracing data as a guiding force, organizations pave the way for meaningful change and lasting impact in the DEI landscape. By making our DEI data accessible and public through an annual report, we're demonstrating our commitment to transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement.

The data in the annual report isn't just a reflection of our successes; it highlights areas where we need to improve. This data-driven approach ensures that resources are allocated where they can make the most significant impact. **IN**