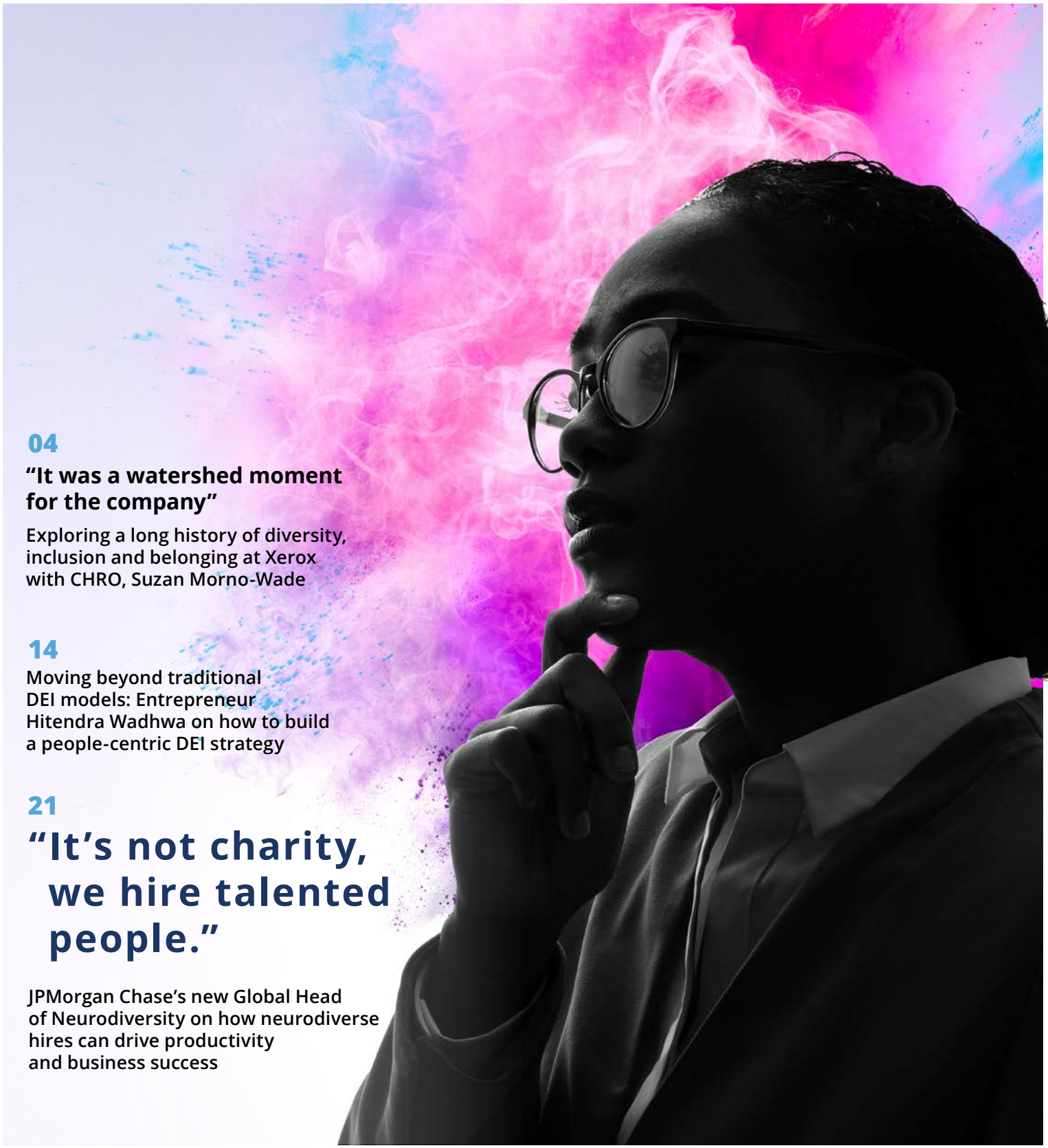
INSIDE CHRO

CONNEX PARTNERS

ISSUE 2

Revealing the inside track on how CHROs are navigating an increasingly complex world



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"It was a watershed moment for the company"

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A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the summer issue of *Inside CHRO*, the only magazine written by – and for – the human capital management community.



This issue we've taken a deep dive into DEI, offering the floor to our Members at the forefront of diversity within their organizations. DEI is an evolving landscape. In this issue we do not pose all the questions, nor attempt to answer all of them. As Indian-American entrepreneur Hitendra Wadhwa says in *Five Minutes With* (page 10), 'forging a better world requires a nuanced approach.' He's right. But nonetheless, our Members have so much knowledge to share, and we're excited to share their learnings in these pages.

Of particular note, Suzan Morno-Wade, Chief Human Resources Officer at Xerox, shares how she led her organization's response to the George Floyd tragedy (page 4) and how that led to some radical – and important – decisions.

I'd also like to draw your attention to our interview with Northwell Health's Chief People Officer, Maxine Carrington. While she reveals a detailed picture of the work the 79,000-strong organization has undertaken to value diversity over the past decade, she also shares with unique candidness some of the more difficult conversations she's had along the way. It's a must-read (page 27).

We also delve into the lesser-covered issue of neurodiversity – interviewing JPMorgan Chase's Head of Neurodiversity, Bryan Gill, about how to cut out bias in hiring (page 21).

We'd love to know what you think. As always, we welcome all feedback, and you can get in touch by emailing us here.



Andrew Johnson
EVP and Founder, Connex Partners
Editor, *Inside CHRO*.

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"CONSIDER THE WHOLE PERSON" INSIDE A SUCCESSFUL DIVERSITY, INCLUSION AND BELONGING STRATEGY

Suzan Morno-Wade on 50 years of pioneering work at Xerox.

George Floyd's murder was a pivotal moment. The day after harrowing videos emerged of Derek Chauvin, a white police officer, kneeling on Floyd's neck, Suzan Morno-Wade, Chief Human Resources Officer at Xerox, started talking to people about it.

First she went to John Visentin, Vice Chairman and Chief Executive. Then she approached other internal leaders and employee resource groups (ERGs). By 9 am the next Monday she had held a meeting with the Chief President of the firm, by 10 am she had met again with Visentin, and by 11 am she had convened the whole leadership team. By noon, they had a plan.

"The plan was to create a safe space," she remembers. "We knew we needed to do something. We didn't know what we were calling it. But we created this movement, this momentum, this program to bring in leaders and talk about their experiences."

Over the next few weeks, Morno-Wade hand-picked leaders from across the company to talk to their colleagues. For the first time, people were invited to share: what did it feel like to be an Asian woman in tech? What did it mean to be a black man in sales? Morno-Wade also stepped up to give a talk. Over the course of the week, 1,500 people within Xerox showed up to the series of two-hour sessions, running three times a day at 6 am, noon and 8 pm. They covered Xerox offices across the whole globe, pulled together under one theme by the integrated communications and marketing teams, inviting open dialogue between employees during question and answer sessions. And Morno-Wade and Visentin attended every single one.

"It was a watershed moment for the company: giving people license to be able to talk about something that previously was taboo," Morno-Wade says. "I didn't realize how impactful that would be."

Diversity, inclusion and belonging (DIB) strategies in companies across the globe came under the microscope in May 2020 and during the Black Lives Matter protests that followed. Many teams made significant changes to the way they approached DIB at this time. Almost three-quarters of companies surveyed by the Cornell Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies (CAHRS) found that DIB became a greater priority for their organization after the events of summer 2020. Almost overnight, HR teams found they went from asking themselves 'how do we supply our resources to more employees?' to 'how do we supply our employees with more resources?'. For many companies, the changes that followed manifested as more allocated funding for the hire of employees in the DIB function, or through a restructuring of DIB, including whether the function was housed inside or outside HR.



Suzan Morno-Wade, Chief Human Resources Officer at Xerox

> It was a watershed moment for the company: giving people license to be able to talk about something that previously was taboo.

Xerox, by contrast, had a long history of considering DIB in its HR practices that laid the groundwork for a more agile response. It also benefited from innovative and adaptable leadership that was willing to move quickly when the need for conversations emerged. With Morno-Wade's leadership, the company was able to embrace what Hitendra Wadhwa, Professor of Practice at Columbia Business School, calls 'a higher consciousness': the idea that there is no one right way to approach DIB, but that each individual should be considered for the whole complexity of their experience, plus the feelings and events that may be affecting them in the moment.

In the past, DIB has focussed on engaging with people along certain demographics – whether that is women, LGBTQ+ people, or by classifying people according to their ethnicity. But work colleagues are only human beings, Wadhwa says. There is only so much time to learn about marginalized groups and to master new rules of engagement. Rather than put people into boxes, today the most effective thinkers in DIB are able to consider the whole person on the day, responding to their feelings, their thoughts and what values have shaped them. That was the genius of Morno-Wade's idea to open up space for people to simply talk: not only did it give people time to share parts of themselves and their lives that they might have been keeping hidden at work, but it did so at a moment of national and international outpouring, when people felt an urgent need for the opportunity to express their feelings in response to current events.

"We have created the environment that it's ok to talk about these things and raise these concerns," Morno-Wade says. "The fact that a black man, despite multiple degrees and where they live, still gets pulled over on the street. Or an Asian woman in technology with a PhD still gets harassed. It said a lot to employees that John [Visentin] and I were on every single one of these calls. And, you can imagine, we started getting lots of calls about things that people had not wanted to talk about before, or that they didn't think the company would address."

Morno-Wade joined Xerox as Vice President of Total Rewards in 2016. She had spent 20 years in HR, working across industries including technology, oil and gas, and consumer goods, but, she says, she had never worked at a company that truly walked the talk when it came to DIB in the same way as Xerox. She was attracted by the company's reputation for progressive hires: Ursula M Burns had been Chief Executive between 2009 and 2016,



With Morno-Wade's leadership, the company was able to embrace 'a higher consciousness'.

> We have created the environment that it's ok to talk about these things and raise these concerns.

putting her among the first black women to be Chief Executive of a Fortune 500 company, and the first woman to succeed another as head of a Fortune 500 company. Morno-Wade thought Xerox was rich with opportunity and ripe for advancing DIB initiatives.

Within two years, Morno-Wade was appointed Executive Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer. She felt fortunate to be working with Visentin as her Chief Executive, a man with five daughters who describes himself as an American immigrant. "He certainly understands discrimination and diversity, living through that with his own family," she says. "I like to say I have a CEO who gets it. And, as we know, a lot of this starts at the top."

To bring about true change within an organization, Morno-Wade says you have to consider the problem holistically, rather than taking a spot approach. Her strategy would encompass how Xerox brought in talent, from sourcing, to hiring, to assessing, onto its development of people, the selection of leaders and how employees were compensated. "It's hire to exit," she says. "When you really focus on all parts of the system, it's good for the business as well."



Diverse management teams create 19 percent higher revenue due to innovation.

But the first step was to make the business case for changes with the management team "Because if it doesn't start there, there's no way that it's sustainable". She started with facts. "This isn't just about something squishy or soft," Morno-Wade says. "I started educating them on the facts of why inclusive companies do better." Diverse companies have 2.3 times higher cashflow per employee over a three-year period, according to research by Deloitte. Diverse management teams create 19 percent higher revenue due to innovation, according to a study by Boston Consulting Group. That's the language of business, Morno-Wade says, and tying it to DIB allows leaders to have a better appreciation of why this is important. "Because many leaders don't want to talk about DIB," she adds. "We know this has been a taboo story. But when you tie it to business, it helps build it into the DNA, and people understand why you want to hold them accountable."

Speaking the language of business allowed Xerox to make a radical decision: two years ago, it tied compensation and incentive plans to DIB. About 150 leaders have pay incentives to advance diversity at the company, plus the ability to track and measure how they are doing towards these goals using regular reporting updated on a dashboard that can be accessed at any time. The technology solutions don't stop there. Xerox uses Talenya to improve the diversity of talent applying. Talenya uses AI to tap into a database of 1.5 billion prospective employees, selecting possible candidates based on combinations of keywords, rather than job titles. The company has also employed Turazo to allow prospective Xerox employees to talk with members of the company's nine ERGs about the work and the culture. The goal

> I like to say I have a CEO who gets it. And, as we know, a lot of this starts at the top.

is to stop women and underrepresented talent from turning down roles because they can't see themselves working at Xerox.

Xerox pioneered the first corporate ERG in 1970, the National Black Employee Caucus, which developed in response to racial tensions in the 1960s, at the encouragement of then-CEO, Joseph Wilson. Today, ERGs are an essential part of decision-making procedure, helping leaders to identify blind spots and new areas of focus. "I tend to view them as ears on the ground," Morno-Wade says. "We as leaders aren't able to hear the same messages that our people hear."

Originally ERG presidents reported to Morno-Wade, who would then feed their messages on to the executive committee. More recently, Xerox updated procedure so that presidents meet directly with the executive committee monthly or quarterly. They have 15 minutes to set their own agenda. "As you can imagine, at the first meeting, some were a bit timid. But now they talk quite openly," she says. "There's no need for me to filter anything." ERGs have also made real changes at the company, including the introduction of permanent holidays for Martin Luther King Day and Veterans Day, and changing the dress code so people can "dress for their day", whether that's a suit for client meetings or jeans on a day with a more relaxed schedule. In the last year, Xerox added a new ERG for veterans, thanks to input from a member of the HR team.

Morno-Wade is a sponsor for the largest group, The Women's Alliance. She mentors the president of the group and speaks with women shaping the agenda. She also takes a special interest in younger talent, meeting with their ERG a couple of times a year to hear their ideas. "They have lots of energy," she says. "They want to run the world, which is perfect for me! We'd like to see them around the board table one day."



Suzan Morno-Wade: "There's no need for me to filter anything."

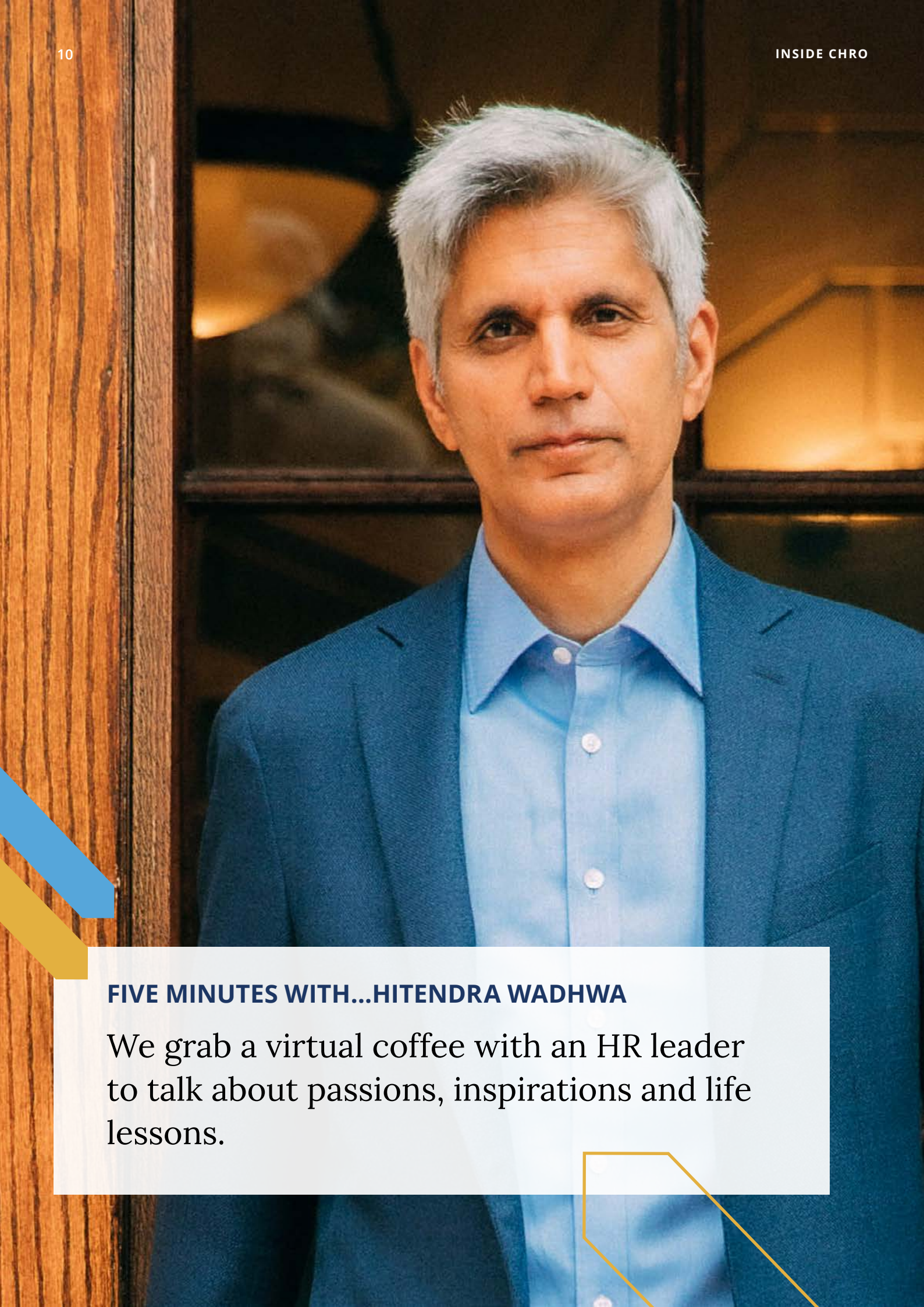
Externally, Xerox works with partner organizations like the Thurgood Marshall College Fund and A Better Chance, a non-profit that helps talented young people of color into high-achieving boarding, day, and public schools. A couple of years ago, Morno-Wade sat on the committee to evaluate students from A Better Chance, spending her evenings and weekends reviewing transcripts, recordings and essays of potential scholars. "It was heartbreaking," she remembers. "Some are in vehicles doing their videos. One was on a park bench. Kids who have a very different upbringing than most of us have been accustomed to." Not long after, an older communications major from the program came to work with Morno-Wade as an intern. Morno-Wade brought her into the C-suite, where she could listen to meetings, then asked her to help design an

> Even if they don't come and work for Xerox, anything that we can do to help underrepresented groups advance, benefits society at large. And that will benefit us indirectly.

internship pipeline for the company. It was eye-opening for the student, Morno-Wade says, but it was also a great reminder for her as an executive. "You learn quite a bit," she says. "Even if they don't come and work for Xerox, anything that we can do to help underrepresented groups advance, benefits society at large. And that will benefit us indirectly."

For Morno-Wade, DIB can be boiled down to one thing: how a company treats its people. That means how they communicate, how they create safe environments and how people collaborate within the organization to solve problems. "Over the last couple of years, there has been more focus on the financial aspects of work. But the future is evolving to the people-side of the equation and how we create new environments representing all of society," she says. "That, in turn, advances the goals of the company."





FIVE MINUTES WITH...HITENDRA WADHWA

We grab a virtual coffee with an HR leader to talk about passions, inspirations and life lessons.

"It's time to eschew diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) boxes in favor of activating the whole person", says Indian-American entrepreneur, Hitendra Wadhwa. We sit down with the founder of the Mentora Institute, and teacher of Columbia's most popular MBA leadership class on Personal Leadership & Success to discuss the future of DEIA.

Where is DEIA now, and how far has it to go?

In the past, we had a certain dominant view of what culture was, and by extension, what the right behaviors were.

But we're starting to understand there isn't just one right way to do things. We're starting to see a rich diversity in how people are wired; in the ways they have lived their lives; what experiences they've had, and, by extension, how they show up at work.

The dominant idea today is to put people in boxes, based on their sociodemographic identity. Here's how to engage with women, with Blacks, with Asians, with LGBTQIA+ employees, etc. The intention is to create human-centered organizations where everyone feels respected and welcomed.

But this approach of putting people into sociodemographic boxes, I suggest, is doomed to fail. Because it directs you to learn 12 different checklists for how to engage with 12 different groups – here's what you should say, here's what you shouldn't say, and so on. And new groups we should be mindful of are emerging every day. The reality is, there's only so much information an individual can soak in and master.

A second limitation of this approach is that people do not actually fit neatly into boxes. As an Asian-American, do I think and feel and behave like all Asian-Americans? Are my values the same as every other Asian-American? That's a real stretch. And the same is true of these other boxes – there's a lot of variety in the kinds of people in there.

What we need to do instead is honor each individual for who they are. Remove them from the box, and see them for their unique self. In fact, the same individual may be different from one day to the next. Between the last time you met them and today, perhaps they've had a serious illness in the family, or celebrated their daughter's wedding, or just come out of a very upsetting meeting. So how can you assume this individual is exactly where they were in life the last time you saw them?

How do we approach a framework that addresses the individual?

We can do this by tuning in to the people we are interacting with, moment by moment. What are they feeling, and what are they thinking? What do they value? What beliefs and motivations are likely fuelling their actions?

This requires us to be 100% present in our interactions. So, we pay attention to people's tone of voice, facial expressions, and choice of words.



Hitendra Wadhwa, founder of the Mentora Institute

> You are expected to feel obligated to learn everything about a marginalized group, of which new ones are emerging every day.



Hitendra Wadhwa: "We're starting to understand there isn't just one right way to do things."

We must approach every moment with a sense of curiosity – what mood is this other individual in, how receptive are they to the ideas I'm sharing, is something holding them back, what can I do to make them feel more comfortable in this team?

How can leaders move beyond that traditional model to take on a more effective and sustainable alternative?

My research at Columbia Business School and the Mentora Institute is focused on helping leaders develop a much broader lens for how to understand and respond to the humanity in their people – by not just examining what people say, but what their intentions might be, what values are informing their position. What their personal story is.

Leaders need to get to know their people from the inside-out. They need to develop an "inner map" of the people they work with. What have been the defining moments in my colleague's life? What values do they get most stirred by? What is their big dream in life? What's the mood they are in right now, and what may be driving that? What mindset is influencing their response?

And similarly for an audience. What's top of mind for my audience right now? Is there more than one sentiment present among the people in this room? What's going to make them inspired, and what's going to make them most comfortable in this conversation?

Once you've attuned yourself to people from the inside-out, you can walk away from all the checklists the experts may give you and approach interactions in a more nuanced way. You can then be guided by your own best judgement in the moment, once you've gathered an accurate reading of the room.

How practical is it for leaders to master your new approach for dealing with the human equation at work?

That's been one of our key obsessions at Mentora Institute – to make human-centered leadership very practical to achieve. After fifteen years of research and innovation on this topic, the key we have found is to help leaders learn to win their inner game before they play their outer game.

This inner game is won when a leader learns to focus on their five Core energies: the energy of *Purpose*, which gets us to strive to create a sense of energized action around a common objective; the energy of *Wisdom*, which is about calmly engaging the intellect to find the truth; the energy of *Growth*, which recognizes that we always have the opportunity to move beyond our struggles of the past to grow and learn and improve; the energy of *Love*, which recognizes we are all connected and should therefore take joy in other peoples' joy; and finally, the energy of *Self-realization*, which recognizes the human spirit at

> This model makes us tune ourselves to the inner variables driving a person's behavior – the five Energies that lie at their core.

the core of our being.

Once you have activated these energies, then in any situation, you do not need a scripted checklist to follow. Instead, you're evaluating, in every moment, "Do I need to activate Purpose, or Love, or Wisdom…?"

We've discovered that along each of these five Core Energies there are roughly 5-10 archetypal actions that you see repeated in all acts of great leadership: in having a difficult conversation; inspiring someone; trust-building, etc. These Core actions can be used, like building blocks, to construct whatever behaviors you need in the moment. Each action typically takes 5-10 seconds to execute – so they are really simple to learn, and simple to execute.

By moving from one action to the next, you become more adaptable. You sense the dynamics between you and the other party and then add the next building block – the action – you need to take the interaction in the right direction. Repeating the process every 5-10 seconds – what am I sensing from their facial expressions; why was there a pause in the conversation with that topic; what should my next action be? As you master these simple actions, you cultivate a skillset that allows you to bring out the best in all people and all situations – and that, to me, is the true practice of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

Forging a better world requires a more nuanced approach from us than what today's checklists and frameworks offer. It requires us to activate the five Core energies across our organization. This was, for example, how Nelson Mandela led. He saw an effulgent spirit even within his jailers, when they had him handcuffed and imprisoned, and he sought to activate that potential in them, through actions that expressed Purpose, Wisdom, Growth, Love and Self-realization. Later, upon his release from prison, he sought to do this in all South Africans as he led the country to a peaceful transition from apartheid rule to a democracy. He was an ordinary person who ascended to extraordinary leadership. So can we.



Hitendra Wadhwa

Hitendra Wadhwa is also the author of the book, "Inner Mastery, Outer Impact: How Your Five Core Energies Hold the Key to Success" (Hachette Book Group, June 2022).

As Professor of Practice at Columbia Business School and Founder of the Mentora Institute, Hitendra has coached dozens of Fortune 100 C-suite executives and taught more than ten thousand MBAs, executives, doctors, lawyers, social activists and educators. His class on Personal Leadership & Success is one of the most popular at Columbia Business School, for which he has won the Dean's Award for Teaching Excellence.

Wadhwa's Mentora Institute is at the forefront of creating a simple, inspiring, and personalized approach to developing leaders. His clients include Accenture, Chevron, Ericsson, Kraft Heinz, Lululemon, Morgan Stanley, New York Times, SAP, the Tata Group and United Health Group. His nonprofit Mentora Foundation is developing a fellowship of global changemakers who are committed to building a principled world by strengthening the moral, mental, and social fibers in their families, organizations, communities, and nations, starting with their own selves.

Previously, Wadhwa was a strategy consultant at McKinsey & Company and the CEO/founder of a Silicon Valley start-up, Paramark, which was twice recognized as a Top-100 Internet technology company by Technologic Partners/Venture Wire.

EXCEEDING THE BREAKEVEN: THE DEI BUSINESS CASE

Diversity, equity, and inclusion present unique opportunities for businesses to have their cake and eat it too, as creating a workplace that reflects those values isn't just ethical – it's a growing financial imperative.



Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is finally receiving the recognition it deserves as a core business strategy, and just in time to assist with today's complex labor realities. As the available labor pool dwindles, and competition for top talent skyrockets, employees have more choices than ever before. Conversations with Connex Community members indicate that employees aren't as willing to tolerate less-than-ideal circumstances as they may have been in the past, which places an outsized importance on fostering a sense of belonging in order to compete.

This pressure is felt by all, but especially by those undergoing additional change. First Horizon Bank, the regional banking arm of First Horizon Corporation that services the American Southeast, knows this firsthand as they work through the largest merger in their history. It's required a comprehensive reevaluation of their purpose, values, and behaviors as they work to bring two cultures together, ever cognizant of the external factors that must also be accounted for. "One [of our core values] is elevating Equity – placing it at the center of our Diversity and Inclusion efforts," explains Tanya Hart, Chief Human Resources Officer at First Horizon Bank. "It helps to create what we consider Accountability, and it shows Accessibility, while creating Opportunity for All."

Hart has spent an impressive three decades with First Horizon, growing and evolving throughout her career alongside the business. She began as a teller, working and going to school full-time, before rising through the sales ranks to become a corporate trainer. As she was finishing her degree, she decided she wanted to do something different, but she hadn't considered leaving First Horizon to do it. The culture they had built enticed her to stay, and rather than lose that, she took a lateral move into financial planning. A decade later and she would once again get the drive to do something new and exciting, this time moving into Human Resources with a focus on Compensation under the tutelage of a particularly motivational leader.

"All the things I had done – undergrad in Finance, MBA, working for ten years as a financial planner – you wouldn't think there'd be a spot for me in HR," says Hart, "But when I got to Executive Compensation, that's really all I had been doing for the last ten years [...] and I fell in love." Hart would eventually be tasked with developing their talent and preparing their mid-level leaders for new opportunities with First Horizon: a particularly fitting assignment given her own journey through the company. Reflecting on how it was their culture, the sense of belonging she felt, and the recognition she received along the way as a valued member of the team, it became abundantly clear how DEI, talent management, and business strategy work in tandem.



Tanya Hart, Chief Human Resources Officer at First Horizon Bank

> One [of our core values] is elevating Equity – placing it at the center of our Diversity and Inclusion efforts.

The Amazon problem

They view Equity as a key differentiator for the organization, helping them get ahead in an industry that still has pockets of more traditional thinking. They've "been using a lot of data-driven insights" to help make their strategy and execution more evidence-based, leveraging trusted industry sources like Bloomberg, Gartner, and McKinsey alongside their own internal surveying. Hart believes that kind of comprehensive approach to understanding DEI and labor opportunities is critical for any business, but especially those of their size. It's nearly impossible to compete with the Amazons or Googles of the world, especially now that the broad acceptance of remote work has blurred the lines between previously geographically isolated labor pools.



Northwell has worked DEI strategy into their Corporate Social Responsibility goals.

As Hart puts it: "We must be more intentional. It's going to be our culture that wins this for us. It's not going to be anything more than that because we're not always going to win on pay. Our culture is always going to be the differentiator, and that's why I'm really proud that we're focused on elevating Equity."

Making DEI actionable through data

If she could have done anything differently though, Hart says she would have hammered the importance of data and its relation to the business case sooner than they did: "Data doesn't really lie. When you have data and you incorporate it into your approach, you're going to be better served." Maxine Carrington, SVP and Chief People Officer at Northwell Health, not only agrees, but has found it's integral to illustrating the importance of DEI to her colleagues. Carrington frames their business case for DEI in terms that are likely familiar to any HR executive: "You're going to be more profitable, attractive, and retentive; your outcomes are going to be better because you've created an environment where there's more psychological safety; you've invited more voices, diverse perspectives, and opinions, all of which get you to more innovation."

To better operationalize the measurement of their progress and ensure they hold themselves accountable, Northwell has worked DEI strategy into their already robust Corporate Social Responsibility goals. "We have representation goals of increasing the representation of certain groups, in certain roles, by this amount by X date," describes Carrington, "And training leaders in unconscious bias and inclusive leadership by this date." It's this synthesis and intermingling of strategies that has driven Northwell to become DiversityInc's 'Best Health System for Diversity' in the US for two consecutive years.

More robust and granular data analysis is also enabling First Horizon to better address some of their discrete gaps that previously flew under the



J. Brian Coleman, VP of Total Rewards at Dawn Food Products

radar. For example, it was a detailed analysis of their first survey results after the merger that highlighted DEI gaps for employees with disabilities. "Some disabilities you can see, but there are some that you don't," making a strong case for data's utility in truly understanding where strategy needs to move and how it can be operationalized. Hart went on to explain that data has also helped them realize the vital interplay between DEI and total rewards. Their analysis indicates both current and prospective employees are looking for richer packages that promote a better overall work-life balance post-pandemic, and they want those packages to equitably address their needs as much as their colleagues'.

Employees expect their share of cake

This comes as no surprise to the Vice President of Total Rewards at Dawn Food Products, J. Brian Coleman: "We learned a long time ago that the traditional model of one-size-fits-all doesn't help anybody, so we've had to look at how we can optimize [total rewards] across all our differences." Dawn Foods is a family-owned, global bakery supplier that partners with bakers, retailers, and other culinary experts to provide them with the ingredients and finished baked goods they need to keep their customers satisfied. "We do one of the happiest things in the world," says Coleman, "Cookies, cakes, muffins – when you say those things everyone goes back to a happy time in their life." Dawn Foods is an incredibly diverse company, both externally with their clientele and internally with employees. They have team members that range from age 18 to 105, all from different walks of life. They've been in business for more than 100 years, fostering a positive, family-like culture that engages across generations; in fact, it's common for children and grandchildren of employees to eventually be welcomed into the Dawn family, with Coleman explaining there's a near 1 in 3 chance that someone's descendants will be hired. That family-centric view is what pushed them to recognize their rich diversity and honor it in their daily operations: "It's the right thing to do: to take care of your folks. It's how we take care of our best resource," Coleman argues while referencing staff, "Because that makes us more competitive."



J. Brian Coleman: "We learned a long time ago that the traditional model of one-size-fits-all doesn't help anybody."

By providing a total rewards package that can flexibly address the diverse needs and desires of employees, Dawn Foods has forged and maintained the competitive edge they need to succeed. Their package is a tangible, employee-facing way to create the kind of welcoming environment needed to compete for the best talent in the industry, and to Carrington's points, their magnetism ensures they have access to

> It's the right thing to do: to take care of your folks. It's how we take care of our best resource...because that makes us more competitive.

a plethora of unique and innovative ideas employee ideas. "I joke with everyone – who would have thought to do a sourdough donut," Coleman laughs while remembering one team member's unexpected idea, "But it's awesome! When you get groups together and really open that thinking lane up, anything you can imagine, you can do."

A finger in every pie

And when it comes to Dawn Foods, they've made a habit of 'doing'. Coleman has a longstanding history of executing on their DEI strategy and priming its many competitive advantages by continually adding to and updating their ever-growing list of team member resources. He set to work moving the organization away from their one-size-fits-all approach after joining in 2007, starting by laying the foundation for more substantial financial wellbeing and advocacy programs. They've brought in several different solutions since then, including one with Salary Finance which teaches employees how to better manage their financial challenges and grow their credit; that includes credit repair programs through the nonprofit United Way via loan repayment programs. Those benefits are paired with a financial advisor program that's been routinely updated based on employee survey feedback, ever broadening the types of situations they speak to.

Coleman stresses the importance of a robust employee listening strategy underpinning both DEI and total rewards work, as it's the only way to truly understand what motivates employees, or alternatively, what life situations are holding



J. Brian Coleman: "When you get groups together and really open that thinking lane up, anything you can imagine, you can do."

them back. Their willingness to listen has led to several other key plan additions, including student loan support for those struggling with university debt; Torchlight, which helps connect employees with elder and childcare support services; and accident coverage, which has helped keep money in employees' pockets following the unexpected. "So many people are within $1,000 to $2,000 of major catastrophe," laments Coleman, "And a good number of our team members are living paycheck to paycheck, so how do we help them in their situation, and in a way that they want to be helped? We all know the old adage of three steps forward, and two steps back – how do you help [employees] not have to do the two back?"

While Dawn Foods has introduced plenty of new programs from their more than 26 benefit vendors – including Prudential, who they worked with to become one of the first companies to bring an emergency savings program to life – they've also

brought their DEI strategy to life by making changes to existing ones. For example, they've changed their policies to ensure employees have access to paid parental leave from day one, rather than requiring a year of service first. They even allow for said leave to be taken intermittently within the first year rather than as one block, providing new parents with much-needed flexibility. They've also increased their medical coverages to cover both hormone therapy and surgical coverage for employees undergoing gender affirmation treatment. "We are a diverse group of folks in the States, with different cultures, wants, and desires," explains Coleman, "And the power of total rewards isn't just over the almighty dollar, but how you serve, help employees with their needs, and get them to the place they want to be."

Spreading the word

Changes cannot be made in a vacuum, however, as the value of a diverse total rewards package won't be generated unless employees leverage it to its fullest potential. As Coleman puts it: "We've launched things that tied right in where people wanted to go for strategy, but they didn't know it existed – it's really a hurdle to jump, especially when you're an organization that likes to do a lot for team members." Dawn Foods has employed a range of communication techniques that are as diverse as their employees, from traditional mailers to physical flyers near timeclocks with QR codes that make it easy for the spouses who may be actually driving benefit elections to pull up key information. Coleman is in the process of updating that strategy to take advantage of resources like YouTube, where private company channels would have informative, bite-sized videos on onboarding, open enrolment, and everything in-between.



Dawn Foods has employed a range of communication techniques to encourage employees to leverage its total rewards package.

One of their most successful communication programs had them touring locations via an informative roadshow, and while it was resource intensive, it was lucrative. Torchlight, which they originally added as a niche benefit for those who'd need it most and with no expectation of significant uptake, jumped from 3% to 18% utilization. Their partnership with Teladoc saw even more impressive utilization spikes, with personal stories and anecdotes driving enough activity to achieve an estimated $500,000 in healthcare-related savings within that first year.

Coleman argues that a "playbook" becomes a necessity, as with enough programs, the move away from a one-size-fits-all strategy begins to look like a "big giant catalogue". He advocates for "dialogue sessions" between the different stakeholders in the process – including HR, total rewards, and DEI teams – and goes as far as having their vendors do the same. Representatives from their many total rewards partners meet monthly to align around Dawn Foods' strategic vision for their programs, working in concert to understand what role their solution plays and how it can work in tandem with the others. It's a large ask that requires communication and collaboration across "HR, payroll, compensation, benefits, and even travel", but in Coleman's assessment, it's more than worth it.

> Enterprises can no longer afford milquetoast, uninspired, compliance-driven DEI strategies.

Reconciling past and present

Hart very much agrees: "There's always going to be headwinds when it comes to elevating Equity", and that's on top of the ways in which traditional strains on the business have been exacerbated by the pandemic's fallout. "COVID has had a huge impact on everyone's business"; inflation is on the rise; and employees are changing the ways in which they want to work. "But in face of those headwinds", Hart believes their "DEI strategies will help [them] to overcome those challenges."

There have been some stirrings in the industry about this being a new chapter in the ongoing evolution of human capital management, with longtime DEI executive Daisy Auger-Domínguez going as far as naming her most recent book on the subject Inclusion Revolution. 'Revolution' is a particularly fitting word given its context in the United States, as it was the Enlightenment ideals of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" that pushed a conglomeration of colonies to break away from the English monarchy, all in service to the mantra that all are "created equal". 'Equality', however, carries with it an extreme version of impartiality that fails to recognize the nuance of societal and economic realities. As Coleman puts it, "Everyone starts from a different position in life, with a different look at life," underscoring the importance of 'Equity' as means of actually achieving those centuries-old ambitions.

There's a lot to be done, and no one has it all figured out. But whether it's to win out on talent, spur innovation, or even just because it's the moral choice in an era of growing empathy, the 'business case' is driven by the fact that enterprises can no longer afford milquetoast, uninspired, compliance-driven DEI strategies. ■





"IT'S NOT CHARITY": THE POWER OF COGNITIVE DIVERSITY

The Global Head of Neurodiversity at JPMorgan Chase on how neurodiverse hires can drive productivity and business goals – and where to get started.

AUTHOR: HAZEL SHEFFIELD

In January 2022, JPMorgan Chase appointed its first Global Head of Neurodiversity. It was a historic moment for inclusivity at the investment bank, seven years since a handful of individuals on the spectrum gathered together to pilot an Autism at Work program there.

That program now spans more than 40 different job roles, across nine countries, and works in partnership with the Business Solutions Team or BeST, which matches the talents of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities with operations roles customized to solve business problems. With the appointment of Bryan Gill, an operations executive with almost 20 years of experience at the firm, the two programs now have a dedicated full-time manager – and someone whose express role is to evolve the work and look for new talent.

"We think of it like this," Gill says. "The colleague you sit next to in a meeting or encounter in the cafeteria may process information differently from you, and that's ok. You expect to meet diversity here at JPMorgan Chase."

Almost ten years since SAP, the German technology company, began seeking out neurodivergent employees through its own Autism at Work program, companies across industries are waking up to the fact that in most roles, it pays to have people who think differently from one another. In cybersecurity, for example, hires have to be able to anticipate the actions of an adversary and make sure a company's defenses are operational long before a threat becomes reality – a problem that requires thinking from all different angles.

But it's not just as simple as recruiting individuals who describe themselves as neurodivergent. A sophisticated HR strategy is required to assess candidates and support neurodiversity in existing roles. Such employees can benefit from different hiring processes, adjustments to the physical work environment, alternative approaches to communication and more. "In many cases neurodiverse candidates are extremely talented people who have been excluded because of unknowingly biased processes," says Cait Rosica, Director of the Neurodiversity Employment Network in Philadelphia, which consults companies that wish to employ neurodivergent people on best practices.

Autism affects one in 42 boys and one in 189 girls in the US, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But it is only one of a spectrum of conditions that fall under the term 'neurodiversity', including dyspraxia (a neurologically-based physical disorder), dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and social anxiety disorders. Many of these disorders come with above-average abilities in certain fields. People with autism and dyslexia, for example, might be especially good at mathematics



Bryan Gill, Global Head of Neurodiversity at JPMorgan Chase

> People with neurodiversity typically don't interview well. We may end up screening these people out.

or memory or have special abilities to recognize patterns in large amounts of data. Yet neurodiverse individuals remain chronically under-employed: unemployment for neurodivergent adults runs at 30-40 percent, three times the rate for people with disability and eight times the rate for unaffected adults, according to the Center for Neurodiversity and Employment Innovation at the University of Connecticut.



Bryan Gill: "The colleague you sit next to...may process information differently from you, and that's ok."

Cutting out bias in hiring

One of the first things companies can do is adjust their hiring practices. Specialists advocate for skills-based hiring versus a talk interview. This gives candidates the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities in a role without being judged on how charming they are or their ability to make eye contact while answering questions face-to-face. "We know that interviews aren't a great way to hire any kind of candidate," says Dr Dawn Eubanks from the behavioral science group at Warwick University, UK. "But people with neurodiversity typically don't interview well. We may end up screening these people out." Eubanks suggests giving candidates a task that reflects what they might do in the job. "A lot of neurodiverse individuals are attracted to jobs in technology, cyber security, and pattern recognition. Give them a showcase for their skills, so they can spend a half day working on some piece of technology or robotics construction, something hands-on."

Before the pandemic, Microsoft conducted interviews in person at its campus in Redmond, Washington. Prospective candidates had to fly in from their hometown, stay in a hotel and navigate through the campus. But when Covid hit, the firm transitioned to a virtual model using Microsoft Teams to hold week-long hiring events online, harnessing captioning and chat messaging to enhance accessibility. For team-building exercises, Microsoft developed Minecraft worlds with customized challenges for candidates to work through in small groups, where they could showcase communication skills, problem-solving and leadership online. Feedback showed some candidates felt more comfortable with this model, and more able to use their own communication styles than they might in person.

Companies ahead of the curve are constantly evolving their hiring practices. In 2021, Microsoft expanded its Autism Hiring program, launched in 2015, to include all aspects of neurodiversity, from ADHD to dyspraxia and dyscalculia (difficulty understanding numbers) and renamed it the Microsoft Neurodiversity Hiring Program. Microsoft documents its work in this area in an Autism at Work playbook, developed in partnership with the University of Washington and other companies in

> It's not charity, we hire talented people who are qualified to work here in jobs that move our business forward.

the Autism at Work Employer Roundtable, which provides support to more than 25 employers seeking to launch their own corporate initiatives, powered by founding members Microsoft, EY, JPMorgan Chase and SAP.

The playbook, which covers every aspect of recruiting, interviewing, onboarding and developing talent, begins with the most common question employers ask: how do they get started? The answer, the companies say, is to get executive buy-in from the beginning and prepare a business case, then reach out for help. Identifying a program leader is high on the list, alongside recruiting hiring managers who can learn quickly, cultivating an inclusive culture and demonstrating a high commitment to diversity.

> The work-life balance is flexible, and there's a lot of room for people to express their true authentic selves.

Making neurodiversity part of the business strategy

Gill says JPMorgan Chase's work around neurodiversity has grown organically and with intention, but it's always been a business strategy. "Our Autism at Work colleagues are driving productivity gains across numerous roles and departments — and both the types of jobs and the number of businesses they work in have expanded," he says. "But remember, this program is not just about numbers — and it's not charity: we hire talented people who are qualified to work here in jobs that move our business forward and drive inclusion." From the start, the company established that any candidate with the qualifications to ace a job should have the same opportunities as anyone else, regardless of their disability, and set about building a robust support system and necessary accommodations so that neurodiverse candidates could get what they need to be successful.



Michael Giongo, Neurodiverse employee at SAP

Practical ways to help neurodiverse hires progress

When these operations work successfully, neurodiverse hires can operate seamlessly within firms, barely interacting with targeted programs. Today, Michael Giongo is a math and physics major who works in business analysis at SAP and speaks openly about his experiences as an employee with autism. He remembers the waves of confusion he would get as a student, unsure how to behave or respond in certain social situations and how to follow instructions in the classroom or professional

> The next frontier for neuro-diverse hiring is within smaller companies, which might not have the same capacity to implement programs.

settings. In such situations he could become obsessed with details to the point that the world became a cacophony, threatening to overwhelm his senses. That changed at SAP, when he was recruited as an intern at the Center of Expertise through the Autism at Work program. SAP provided him with multiple opportunities to work on his soft skills, he says, including his communication skills, as well as identifying his attention to detail as a special skill that could benefit the firm. "The work-life balance is flexible, and there's a lot of room for people to express their true authentic selves," he says. Eubanks gives other examples of where employers might be able to help neurodiverse individuals settle into roles, including the use of step-by-step guides or other specific instructions for social interactions. People on the autism spectrum can struggle in unscripted situations like on a lunch break, she says, because they don't know what to do. "There's a tendency for people with neurodiversity to take things quite literally, so they might have trouble detecting humor and sarcasm which can be helpful in the workplace," she says. "It helps to know that, otherwise you might think someone is being rude, or that they don't like you, when really they are taking the situation very literally."



Dr Dawn Eubanks, Warwick University, UK

Companies can help neurodiverse individuals with these skills through role-play, and clear problem definitions. "Sometimes the problem part can be more difficult," Eubanks says. "So they might need more help clarifying the problem." She suggests that someone in a team comes up with a clear problem definition that can be worked on by neurodiverse and non-neurodiverse teams in collaboration. Eubanks also suggests candidates practice soft skills on video and go through the tapes with someone who can provide feedback. "People with neurodiversity sometimes have difficulty watching someone else and translating that into their own behavior, so it would be more helpful to try it out themselves," she says. Executives can also consider adapting the work environment. Some neurodiverse individuals are sensitive to loud noises, for example, and can benefit from headphones, dim lighting or quiet workplaces.

Looking beyond big tech for change

For a long time, the conversation about neurodiversity was about different roles, Rosica says. Now, there is an important realization that this group, just like any other, is diverse. People with autism might sell themselves short during negotiations, for example, asking for things based on what they have received in the past, rather than getting a better deal

for themselves, because of a tendency to take things literally. “They can end up putting themselves in a stressful situation they didn’t realize would happen,” Eubanks says. Meanwhile, people with ADHD may have more capacity for risk-taking and a preference for idea generation, but difficulties working on the back end of a problem or seeing things through. “That’s why you need diverse teams,” Eubanks says. “Because if everyone is getting into ideas generation, no one is ready to execute.”

Rosica says that the next frontier for neuro-diverse hiring is within smaller companies, which might not have the same capacity to implement programs like the big tech and banking companies. “The part that we really need to get to and that has been gaining momentum is looking at small businesses,” Rosica says. “Those are the people who are really going to scale this work and make it happen. Sometimes it’s easier because you can make decisions more quickly, but it might be harder because you don’t have the budget.”

The kind of integration demonstrated by SAP is essential to make sure neurodiverse individuals aren’t stigmatized by well-meaning employers. According to Giongo, neurodiverse individuals in smaller firms may be acknowledged and celebrated, but if they need accommodations that don’t fit the business goals, it can become stigmatizing, for example, if a neurodiverse individual needed extra time to meet a deadline that was considered a business priority. “It can feel like someone asking for accommodations is being singled out,” he says. The Autism at Work program now plays more of a background role in Giongo’s day-to-day, thanks to SAP normalizing diversity throughout the firm. “Fundamentally, the support is there if someone needs support,” he says. “But if someone doesn’t need it, they are free to pursue an upward career trajectory.”





Hazel Sheffield

Hazel Sheffield, former business editor of the Independent, writes about economics and business for publications including the *Financial Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Atlantic.*



DIVERSITY: STOP CONSUMING, START VALUING

Northwell Health's Chief People Officer, Maxine Carrington, providess candid insight into their DEIAB program and how it's being elevated by rejecting diversity consumerism.

Born in Grenada, WI and raised in Brooklyn, NY, SVP and Chief People Officer Maxine Carrington leads the people strategy for Northwell's 79,000-team member organization. Her lived experiences, paired with her professional focus on how organizational effectiveness, performance, strategic vision, and diversity, equity, inclusion, allyship, and belonging (DEIAB) work in tandem to support Northwell's values and community mission, give her a unique perspective on what an employer can achieve.

Northwell Health has been named DiversityInc's 'Best Health System for Diversity' in the US for two years in a row now, making it nine consecutive years they've been on that list. Serving as both New York State's largest care provider and private employer, their ranking is a reflection of their decade-long journey towards actualizing the values of diversity, equity, inclusion, allyship and belonging with both their patients and their team members. These values are something they hold dear, going as far as partnering with the Healthcare Anchor Network to declare racism a public health crisis.

That passion is immediately apparent, as not more than a few brief moments after sitting down with us, Maxine makes her position clear:

Maxine: It has been an amazing privilege to lead the human capital strategy, especially fueling our workforce planning and team member experience initiatives, given how those elements drive DEIAB.

Connex: And it's our privilege to be able to take a peek behind the curtain of what's made Northwell's DEIAB program successful. Thank you for joining us. One of the trends we've noticed is that organizations begin their journeys in different ways, with different foci. Some target diversity first, others equity, and so on. What was that initial focus for Northwell, and how has that evolved over the years?

Maxine: I really love that question. So, Northwell formally began its journey a little over 10 years ago with the standup of what would later be known as our Center for Equity of Care. The Center was led, and continues to be led, by Dr. Jennifer Mieres, who is our Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer. Most of our initial focus was on health equity, social determinants of health, and providing culturally competent care education to our team members. So, it really began as an extension of our core caregiving mission. From there, we evolved into supplier diversity and other areas, including a greater focus on the workforce. Our workforce strategy launched with the standing up our BERGs (Business Employee Resource Groups). We started with VALOR, which is



Maxine Carrington, SVP and Chief People Officer at Northwell Health

for military service members, veterans, and allies. Then came Expressions for our LGBTQIA+ team members and allies. We then added additional BERGs including our GreenBERG – which focuses on environmental impact – and BRIDGES – which has various segments for our Asian, African American, Jewish, and Latinx communities – and many others.



Maxine Carrington: "It really began as an extension of our core caregiving mission."

In 2018, I came into the Deputy Chief People Officer role, and was tasked with expanding and further formalizing our workforce DEIAB strategy. The first thing we did was reposition some team members in the organization to create a division known as Fair Employment Practices (FEP) within HR. Our FEP team would continue some of the work they had been doing like immigration, making sure we provide a path for team members coming from other countries, supporting their visa status, etc. – as well as our affirmative action compliance. So, very much that traditional, EEO regulatory compliance activity. But then we began to say, okay, we should and need to continue doing that work, but how do we start to set goals, create a real inclusion strategy, and focus on increasing representation of team members from historically underrepresented groups? We partnered together with The Center for Equity of Care and we went out and learned from other organizations. Through the Health Management Academy, we gained the opportunity to come together with other organizations, their heads of DEIAB and learn from their journeys.

We then went out and spoke with over 1,000 team members in the organization, asking such questions as, "What are your perspectives and perceptions of our commitment?". We had been measuring our commitment to DEIAB through our engagement surveys for years; we always did well, don't get me wrong, but we wanted to do *better*. And the first step was sensing out the direction we should head in through our team members. We could have easily Googled an off-the-shelf strategy and put it to work. And we had models that we could tap, but we wanted to make sure our strategy would be relevant and resonant with our workforce. We went out and talked to them and got a ton of input.

Some of the sessions were validating. All were enlightening. Some people talked about having to wear a mask – not feeling like they can be authentic. We started to take it all and put together what our focus would be, including ensuring unbiased career processes and policies, continuing to increase the diversity of our leadership, strategies focused on advancing women, increasing DEIAB education, and greater support of the BERGS from HR. Today, HR and The Center for Equity of Care work together to support the BERGs and there was a concentrated effort on further empowering them, putting them in front of our CEO and senior leadership more, and having them contribute to the strategy of the organization.

I would say we started out with a huge focus on health equity, community, and suppliers, and then we've now evolved to have a big focus on workforce and engaging the workforce in supporting these other key areas. And then COVID hit. The George Floyd tragedy happened. Thankfully we had started

> We always did well, don't get me wrong, but we wanted to do *better*.

this work before, because it meant we didn't come off as reactive. We had already started down that path, and it positioned us to be able to respond. In a way, we really 'big banged' it on the workforce side, hitting diversity, equity, inclusion, allyship and belonging all at once and it's paying off. But as much as we've received these accolades, we don't believe we've fully realized our vision. We believe we have so much more to do.

Aligning leadership

Connex: In some ways, your CEO, Michael Dowling, is a bit of a visionary in that your organization doesn't wait for others. And you're right – the George Floyd tragedy was a major impetus for many to start looking past just checking a compliance box, but you were prepared.

Maxine: That's right. I remember being somewhat frustrated at the time, because I knew as with most events, the channel was going to change. There were going to be people who moved on, and these DEIAB topics would stop being as important. But I also knew there was going to be a group of us who would still be pounding the pavement, moving on the journey. And that this amazing thing we have at Northwell would remain front and center thanks in part to Michael's vision, leadership, and advocacy. It remains a top priority and we're holding ourselves accountable. For example, our executive bonus compensation program includes 'team member perceptions of our DEIAB commitment' as part of a composite measure that informs the bonuses they get. In the future, this perception measure will evolve to a diverse slate hiring measure (the practice of requiring recruiters and hiring managers to fill positions using a diverse pool of qualified candidates). We're setting up our system to capture data more accurately and we have become more transparent in sharing our diversity data.



Maxine Carrington: "We believe we have so much more to do."

Connex: On one hand, it very much starts at the top with your CEO. But sans that, what would you advise an organization do when they're trying to spark change and get the buy-in they need? Is it as simple as if the CEO is not on board, then it's really just too difficult?

Maxine: You know, it's fascinating, right? We've all watched it – this chain reaction of something happens, the organization appoints a Chief Diversity Officer, they get no support and leave to the next opportunity, and the cycle repeats itself. What I've said before when asked this question is, is just as we did, it starts with a listening strategy. If you're not constantly figuring out a way to listen, you're going to be spinning your wheels, creating solutions and strategies in a room by yourself that may not actually be relevant and resonate.

> You've got to keep listening. You'll need pulse surveys, advisory groups, focus groups, round tables, listening tours, social media, Glassdoor, new hire surveys and exit surveys.



Maxine Carrington: "It's using the business case to change hearts and minds."

There have been big lessons learned recently by many company executives, especially CEOs, that you've got to keep listening and you've got to have a strong listening strategy. You'll need pulse surveys, advisory groups, focus groups, round tables, listening tours, and even social media, Glassdoor, new hire surveys and exit surveys. We look at everything, and that helps us inform our strategy and educate our leadership and workforce. And then from the listening, it's how you translate that into partnership and action, and provide transparency around progress and the results, with a willingness to apologize and course correct if something's not working.

And lastly, it's using the business case to change hearts and minds. I will give you a story. I had this experience in an industry conference meeting just after the George Floyd tragedy. During one of the break-out virtual groups, the facilitator says, "As I look at the screen, it's not lost on me that this isn't a very diverse group that I'm meeting with right now." And in my head, I know what's coming – I'm going to be asked to speak on behalf of all black people, right? I know it's coming. And they ask, "Maxine, is there anything you want to say to us? We just want to make sure we give you a voice."

It was so well intended, but my gosh. I said, "Well, the first thing I should say, as I'm sure none of you will be surprised, is that I do not speak for every member of the black community. And in fact, it is a very diverse community. For example, I wasn't born in this country. I'm an immigrant from Grenada. I came here at the age of 4 and grew up in Brooklyn." The second thing was, I asked and implored them to use their platform to advance the business case. If you keep pounding on the business case and show example after example of what company after company has done to become a top performer in their space, and show that correlation, you eventually get traction. And that's a lot of what we did.

Even in our early 1,000+ team member conversations, we came up against folks that said, "These are quotas – you're talking about quotas, and this is all good, but you still have to make sure you hire talented people." And vulnerably, I said to the team, "I don't think I can do more of these sessions. I think you guys go ahead without me for the rest of it." I should have demonstrated more emotional intelligence, and I did externally in my speech, but inside I was on fire. My response was simply, "That's a given. We're Northwell Health. We're never going to knowingly hire people who aren't talented. We want people who are talented. What we're advancing is the business case for why. For us to be sustainably

successful, we have to commit to diversity, equity, inclusion, allyship and belonging. Here's the proof of it as evidenced by these results here, and the research there." You also point to the success of some well-known organizations who are vocally committed to DEIAB because there's admittedly just a sexiness to the big names that some people are attracted to. We found that very helpful.

The empathetic leader

Connex: You've just made me think about the role and value of leaders' emotional and cultural intelligence in all of this. It's a key ingredient to making all this work.

Maxine: You have to. Absolutely. To that point, in the days following the murder of George Floyd, we created resources for leaders like our Guide to Courageous Conversations. We talk about EQ in that guide. We train a lot on EQ at Northwell. I'm certified to – and actively do – teach it. I often joke that when I teach it, it's when I need it the most. And you really do, because to be able to suspend judgment – to be able to suspend an emotional reaction to ignorance – is key to meeting someone where they are, and recognizing that the interaction enables you to go after hearts and minds and help change the course of someone's life.

Connex: If you get too stuck on the fact that they're miles behind, then you're just going to get bogged down.

Maxine: That's right. And you're never going to achieve what you could have in helping them to learn and grow. So many people can share their own journeys and experiences around awakening to their own biases, and awakening to the limitations in their own understanding, and what they knew or didn't know. And they're grateful for the people who were patient with them along the way, versus the folks who kind of shut them off and wanted nothing to do with them. That's the responsibility we take seriously: that we will meet people where they are. Now, we have exited people from the organization who demonstrated discrimination. Whether it's at work or on social media – we have no tolerance for it and will stand firm on that as well. But we really try to stress education, awakening understanding, unconscious bias, and EQ.



Maxine Carrington: "I just know the food and the music, and I'm celebrating."

Going beyond celebration

Maxine: Returning to the business case for a moment, it's also about reframing the perception of DEIAB. I noticed years ago that whenever diversity was communicated, the word "celebrate" was attached. I started challenging our teams: "Has anyone noticed that we only talk about diversity as something we celebrate, not something we value?" And I think that verbiage came about because, most of the time, when people think about and picture diversity, they think of something like an international food fair. We're going to share recipes, and food from around the world. It's baked into the way that we consume diversity.

I consume the music, I consume the food, but I know nothing about the socio-political and economic statuses of those countries, their history, or

contributions to the world. I just know the food and the music, and I'm celebrating. How often have you heard the 'being invited to the dance and being invited to dance' definition of diversity and inclusion? What if we start to instead, say we value them because we know it's going to make us more attractive, improve team member retention, and ultimately make us more profitable and innovative? It's certainly more sustainable than consuming celebration.



Maxine Carrington: "The next goal for us will be elevating their involvement in strategy."

Connex: It's subtle, but it's a clever and awesome way to look at it. Because you're right – most celebrate diversity, and are probably pleased with themselves for doing the 'right' thing, but there's a way we could be achieving a greater impact that more holistically values what diversity really brings to the table.

Maxine: That's right. I think we're drawn to celebrate because the brain immediately shifts to ethnic differences, and those are reflected in consumerism in many ways. Ethnic restaurants, for example. It's a very fascinating thing that we've fallen into a habit of doing. So at Northwell, we're now trying to use the word 'value' followed by describing why we value it. And that doesn't mean we tell our sites not to have their international food fairs. They're great! But we ask that they're also paired with education on that country, their contributions, and their people.

Strategies for ERG creation and community relationships

Connex: Returning to your BERGs for a second, we've heard many Community members ask about best practices for establishing groups like that. What have been Northwell's practical lessons learned?

Maxine: We started small with VALOR and Expressions, which allowed us to really test pilot the model. Starting small is important, because if you go from organization to organization, you'll find there are many different types of groups you could create. You're not going to be able to boil the ocean; you need to listen to employees, start small, and then continually iterate based on their feedback. That needs to be paired with socialization and awareness building so employees can engage with them. And then I would say that there has to be resourcing, both in terms of budget and leadership support. We have executives serving as sponsors for each BERG; that's in addition to co-chairs who lead them, have a dedicated governance structure, a charter, and their own strategic goals. The executive support is important, and it needs to feature them regularly meeting with the group so they're all collaborating together.

We've also noticed that there's a sense of shared accountability when you enable them to report out on their progress, because you're hearing how your leadership colleagues are doing and it creates an environment of encouragement, best practice sharing, and collective success. I'd dare say even also a bit of 'healthy competition'.

We reward a whole lot around their progress through recognition of their contributions by way of increased

development, shout-outs, recognition points that can be used for merchandise, etc. And tying in with the idea of talent mobility, we look at BERG leadership as experience that counts and can be the precursor to appointments, promotions, and selection for other career opportunities.

The next goal for us will be elevating their involvement in strategy. HR and some other divisions like Community and Population Health – led by a great leader, Debbie Sala-Lopez, MD, MPH – rely on them, but we want more of the organization to do the same. We have an Office of Military & Veteran Liaison Services, so we've attached them to VALOR. We have the Katz Institute for Women's Health, which focuses on women and their health equity, so we've attached them to our Women in Healthcare BERG. Our GreenBERG is connected to our supply chain and sustainability initiatives. But not all of them are paired off like that, so that's the next step: fully integrating them throughout so they can help inform the future direction of the organization.

Connex: From a community perspective, what are you doing to partner with other organizations like schools, universities, etc.?



Maxine Carrington: "We have a Workforce Readiness team that helps pipeline talent into the organization..."



Maxine Carrington: "Our next frontier, will be economic equity."

Maxine: That's actually a big part of our work. We have a Workforce Readiness team that helps pipeline talent into the organization, with a focus on inclusive hiring, such as providing inroads for those with disabilities. They're partnering with local government and community organizations, including local departments of labor. For example, we're partnering with the Suffolk County Department of Labor on a gun violence prevention act initiative, which would provide funding to identify 18- to 24-year-olds at risk for being victims or perpetrators of gun violence, and giving them a path to training and employment at Northwell. We have lots of other partnerships with groups to help with things like resume writing, interviewing skills, and then hiring.

We're also partnering with diverse colleges and universities, and have various pipeline programs that expose students at different stages to healthcare careers. We view the definition of 'health' very broadly, and positively impacting our communities is part of that, and it also provides a pipeline for talent into the organization years in advance.

Turning back the clock

Connex: Last question – if you knew what you knew today, what would you have done differently in launching these programs?

Maxine: The obvious answer is we would have started sooner. When you speak with some of the companies who have been at this 20, or even 30 years, it's amazing what they've accomplished. Thankfully, our CEO had the foresight he did – he was appointing women to head our hospitals long before that was common, so bless him for making that commitment. But I recognize how much further along we'd be if we'd had a formalized strategy years prior.

You know, I hate to come off sounding arrogant, but beyond that, I don't know that we would have done anything differently. Our formal strategy came later than would have been ideal, but when we did it, we accelerated our progress by studying other organizations and the experiences they went through. I know that sounds almost like that archetypal job interview response: "My greatest weakness is that I just work too hard."

However, with that also comes the recognition that we have much more ground to cover. We have more real time reporting and understanding of our demographics than ever before, so we'll be leveraging that. Creating that first diversity dashboard was not without a lot of debate, as some members of our team were so concerned about risk. Which makes sense given that healthcare is historically heavily regulated and risk averse. But we made the case that there are plenty of other organizations publicly sharing their workforce demographic data, and so normalizing that transparency will help us take steps forward. Our team members, and one of our customer groups, were also demanding greater transparency.

Our next frontier, especially from a community perspective, will be economic equity. I want to be careful here, as I don't want to sound paternalistic. But diversity, equity, inclusion, allyship and belonging have an impact on the economic standings of the people in your community that you support the advancement of. When we look at the earning ability of say, a black woman, in this country, we know it often takes them another few weeks, or sometimes even months, to make what a white male may have earned in the same role in less time. Imagine the local economic impact your DEIAB commitments can have on the wellbeing of that community. So, we'll be focusing in on economic equity, as a part of our strategy as it continues to evolve. And it'll be continuing to learn from one another and from others with a focus on continuous improvement that will help us be able to do that. ■





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Re: Inclusivity and equity in total rewards

'We recently established an equitable compensation task force, which brought together a representative group of employees from across the organization to talk about rebuilding compensation policies and philosophy. We made sure the group was at least 50% BIPOC, and that there was frontline staff representation since they're the real experts on how total rewards are experienced.'

'One of the things we're doing on the comp side is taking a nationalized approach to a living wage, ensuring that our diverse frontline and call center employees have a solid baseline to begin at. We're basing expectations on the numbers coming out from the federal government in the US, with other countries requiring a little more research and analysis.'

'We increased our annual fitness reimbursement to a per year 'lifestyle' reimbursement. This allows for associates to leverage fitness, health, well-being and work-life balance - e.g. haircuts, pet care, nutritional coaching, childcare, massages, etc. that offer more options than a gym membership alone.'

'Compensation transparency is a huge component of this discussion, and so one of the things I've done with past organizations is arranged trade show presentations for frontline managers and upper management to educate them on how comp strategy and figures are determined. Once they're aware of those comp 101 basics, they're more equipped to have candid and honest conversations with employees.'

Would you like to get involved in the discussion? If you're a member and you'd like to contribute, simply sign into Connex's Community here.

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