Los Angeles Business Journal
DIVERSITY & INCLUSION
Summit

Panelist and Gold Sponsor, Janice Dollar (Wells Fargo), Panelist and Platinum Sponsor, Dr. Lois M. Shelton (CSUN Nazarian College), Panelist and Gold Sponsor, Catherine Crow (Easterseals Disability Services), and Panelist and Platinum Sponsor, Mira Hashmall (Miller Barondess LLP).

Panelist Stephanie Wiggins (Metrolink), Panelist, Philip A. Washington (Metro), Panelist, Amber Meschack (Los Angeles World Airports), Moderator and Diamond Sponsor, Gail Farber (HNTB), and Panelist, Borja Leon (D’Leon Consulting Engineers).

Moderator and Gold Sponsor, Akash Sehgal (Green Hasson Janks), Panelist, Lizette Espinosa Veneziano (infanttech), Panelist and Gold Sponsor, Mercy Steenwyk (ForensisGroup), and Panelist and Diamond Sponsor, Michael Chierenko (Wells Fargo).

Keynote Speaker, Sahar Andrade (Sahar Consulting LLC)

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According to the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corp.’s most recent People, Industry and Jobs Report, the city of Los Angeles and L.A. County as a whole are more racially and ethnically diverse than ever. Approximately 27% of the resident population in both geographies identify as “white,” for example, compared to nearly 50% identifying as having Hispanic or Latino origins.

This has been good for business. Based on mounting research, a diverse assortment of people on the same team helps team members look at problems more carefully while also being more innovative, creative and inclusive about their solutions. Los Angeles boasts a blend of cultures and is a perfect example of how people from different backgrounds come together to make industries and communities thrive.

We also have much to be proud of in terms of our region’s standard-setting leadership role when it comes to diversification programs.

So we welcome you to our fifth annual celebration of what among the most important and exciting aspects of doing business in L.A. – diversity and inclusion.

Our Diversity & Inclusion Summit event, held March 10 at the LA Grand Hotel Downtown, included a series of thought-provoking panels packed with knowledgeable speakers, each of whom is briefly profiled on these pages. We appreciate our panelists taking the time to share their insights and knowledge.

The panels covered topics such as “CEO & Leadership,” “Building a Diverse Team,” “Innovative Mentoring” and a thought-provoking keynote presentation titled “Humanizing Diversity and Inclusion” presented by Sahar Andrade.

Thanks to our sponsors and all the experts who shared their knowledge with us last week and play a proactive and positive role in promoting diversity and inclusion in L.A.’s business community.

Best regards,

Anna Magzanyan
Publisher & CEO
ELEVATING BUSINESS IN LOS ANGELES AND BEYOND

CSUN’s David Nazarian College of Business and Economics is dedicated to educating a diverse student population to achieve career success and be a force for a better future.

(818) 677-2455
CSUN.EDU/NAZARIAN
The Los Angeles Business Journal Celebrates
the LA Business Community’s Leadership Role in Diversity and Inclusion

The Los Angeles Business Journal proudly hosted the fifth annual Diversity and Inclusion Summit event at the LA Grand Hotel Downtown on Tuesday, March 10th. The eventful morning featured a series of panel discussions featuring companies and individuals who have shown an exceptional commitment to promoting practices that advance diversity and inclusion in the workplace and in business leadership. Attendees had the opportunity to learn from the managers and executives who have shown the ability to develop and lead an increasingly diverse workforce and client base to achieve company goals.

CEO & LEADERSHIP
Moderated by Akash Sehgal (Green Hasson Janks), panelists Lizette Espinosa-Veneziano (infanttech), Michael Ormonde (Wells Fargo), and Mercy Steenwyk (ForensisGroup) — executive leaders from different industries and sectors shared their views on challenges and opportunities when building and measuring a culture of diversity and inclusion within their organizations and the effects it has on productivity.

BUILDING A DIVERSE TEAM
Moderated by Scott Robson (Los Angeles Business Journal), panelists Catherine Crow (Easterseals Disability Services), Janice Dollar (Wells Fargo), Mira Hashmall (Miller Barondess LLP), and Dr. Lois M. Shelton (CSUN Nazarian College) — top thought leaders on diversity — shared the issues that need to be considered when building a diverse team and how that correlates to productivity, profitability, business growth and morale.

INNOVATIVE MENTORING
Moderated by Gail Farber (HNTB), panelists Borja Leon (D’Leon Consulting Engineers), Amber Meshack (Los Angeles World Airports), Phillip A. Washington (Metro), and Stephanie Wiggins (Metrolink) helped to define innovative approaches to the ever-important role of mentorship as organizations across multiple sectors of industry move to increase the diversity of their employee base.

KEYNOTE: HUMANIZING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION
The audience also heard an interactive and challenging keynote presentation from Sahar Andrade (Sahar Consulting), truly one of the nation’s leading authorities on the subject of diversity in the workplace. She discussed sensitivity in diversity and inclusion and how the process needs to be humanized and not just about looking at numbers. She urged the audience to go back to the basics of all of us being human beings that share the same foundation.

If we all think the same, can we really make a difference?

Here’s to everyone working to create a smarter, more diverse and inclusive workplace. Because everyone should be able to live their truth, and nothing but the truth.

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SPARK OF COLLABORATION

HNTB partners with cities across the nation, including Los Angeles, to advance STEM education and build collaborative environments. HNTB is honored to manage the SPARK LA program as an investment in future leaders. The more diverse a team is, the more innovative and creative its solutions will be.
Sahar Andrade, MB.BCh. is a diversity, inclusion and leadership consultant and culture competence speaker/consultant, certified as a Social Media Strategist. She has lived, worked and been educated in seven countries and three continents and speaks five languages. She holds a double bachelors degree in medicine and surgery, a major in psychiatry from Cairo University; and has successfully completed a Mastery of HR Studies Certificate Program. She is an author, TED Talk speaker and her Entrepreneur Training Program has received Congressional Recognition. She was awarded the Diversity Insights Award by the National Diversity Council and the Leadership Excellence Award by hr.com.

She is a business advisor at PCR-SBDC, a subsidiary of the Small Business Administration. She termed as a board member for NAAAH and, as a board member for the Los Angeles Diversity Council. She is currently a board member of Leadership Circle of Change. Her book “49 Things About Entrepreneurship” is available via Amazon.

KEYNOTE

SAHAR ANDRADE
Diversity, Inclusion & Leadership Consultant
Sahar Consulting

Sahar Andrade is the creator of the zooby—a baby monitor for cars and smart-temp—a technology tracker of a baby's temperature all day and night. Espinoza-Veneziano’s focus is to drive the vision, team, and strategic roadmap for infanttech. A visionary entrepreneur with a mission and drive to create innovative technology solutions to impact and protect babies and young children. She has always been driven to look beyond the norm and think how she could make a difference by creating global impact. As a rare commodity in the US and a woman in STEM, she is a leader in an industry that only has 25% of women engaged. Prior to this entrepreneurial venture, she led her law office. Preparing for the next generation, she graduated from Loyola Law School Los Angeles, and USC.

CATHERINE CROW
Chief People Officer
Easterseals Disability Services

As chief people officer for Easterseals Southern California, Catherine Crow is responsible for talent acquisition and retention, total rewards, learning and talent development, and employee engagement. Crow has over 25 years of human resources leadership experience and served as vice president of human capital at Optum (United Health Group), senior vice president of people services at DaVita Medical Group and Vice President of Employee and Clinician Services at HealthCare Partners Medical Group, Inc. Crow's area of focus is HR transformation and growth. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from California State University, Fullerton, and a master's degree in social work from the University of Southern California.

LIZETTE ESPINOZA-VENEZIANO
President and Co-Founder
infanttech

Lizette Espinosa-Veneziano is president and co-founder of infanttech; creator of the zooby—a baby monitor for cars and smart-temp—a technology tracker of a baby’s temperature all day and night. Espinosa-Veneziano’s focus is to drive the vision, team, and strategic roadmap for infanttech. A visionary entrepreneur with a mission and drive to create innovative technology solutions to impact and protect babies and young children. She has always been driven to look beyond the norm and think how she could make a difference by creating global impact. As a rare commodity in the US and a woman in STEM, she is a leader in an industry that only has 25% of women engaged. Prior to this entrepreneurial venture, she led her law office. Preparing for the next generation, she graduated from Loyola Law School Los Angeles, and USC.

GAIL FARBER, PE
Orange County Office Leader and Vice President
HNTB Corporation

Gail Farber, PE, serves as HNTB Corporation’s Orange County office leader and vice president, based in the firm’s Santa Ana office. Farber has more than 35 years of transportation industry experience and leads project delivery and HNTB’s strategy to continue growing in Southern California. Her technical skills and her proven leadership ability for multi-agency collaboration enable her to expedite delivery of challenging and complex infrastructure projects. Farber’s breadth of experience spans across the spectrum of public works and involves transportation, water, waste management and buildings for design, delivery, operation and maintenance. Previously, she served as director of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works, one of the nation’s largest public works agencies. As both an engineer and executive manager on a diverse range of projects in the public sector.

MIRA HASHMALL
Partner
Miller Barondess LLP

Mira Hashmall, Partner at Miller Barondess LLP, is an experienced litigator who represents clients in all phases of litigation, from pre-litigation counseling to appellate proceedings. She has successfully represented clients in federal and state court jury trials, including healthcare companies, commercial banks, government agencies, and entertainment studios, among many others. She specializes in employment litigation matters involving race and gender discrimination, retaliation, wage and hour, and wrongful termination claims for private and public employers. Hashmall is a Certified Appellate Specialist and heads the appellate department at Miller Barondess. She has represented clients in appellate proceedings before the U.S. Supreme Court, the Courts of Appeals for the Sixth, Ninth and Tenth Circuits, and the California Courts of Appeal.

JANICE DOLLAR
SVP/Regional Services Senior Manager
Wells Fargo

Janice Dollar is a senior vice president and the regional services senior manager for the Greater California Community Bank with a team of approximately 60 team members who oversee banking operations, compliance, auditing, loss prevention, risk mitigation and conduct risk overview for Wells Fargo’s 650+ retail banking branches across the state of California. A 26-year Wells Fargo financial services veteran, Dollar assumed her current position in 2009. She has spent the majority of her banking career supporting Community Banking team members and banking customers in the Greater Los Angeles area down to the border. Dollar began her career as a part time teller, working in community banking, in various positions from branch manager to district manager with oversight of 12 branches in the Santa Clarita Valley market.

BORJA LEON, PE
Managing Director
D’Leon Consulting Engineers

Borja Leon is a transportation and infrastructure professional with close to 20 years of experience in both the private and public sector. He has led the advancement and implementation of major infrastructure projects in the Los Angeles, Orange County, San Diego and Sacramento. He joined D’Leon Consulting Engineers in November 2018 and is the Managing Director for all companies’ transportation, aviation, construction and program management practices. Leon previously served as Deputy Mayor for Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa from 2001 to 2013. Leon took a chief role in developing and implementing Mayor Villaraigosa’s transportation agenda, which included the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro), the Los Angeles World Airports (LAWA), the California Department of Transportation, among other agencies.

GAIL FARBER, PE
Orange County Office Leader and Vice President
HNTB Corporation

Gail Farber, PE, serves as HNTB Corporation’s Orange County office leader and vice president, based in the firm’s Santa Ana office. Farber has more than 35 years of transportation industry experience and leads project delivery and HNTB’s strategy to continue growing in Southern California. Her technical skills and her proven leadership ability for multi-agency collaboration enable her to expedite delivery of challenging and complex infrastructure projects. Farber’s breadth of experience spans across the spectrum of public works and involves transportation, water, waste management and buildings for design, delivery, operation and maintenance. Previously, she served as director of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works, one of the nation’s largest public works agencies. As both an engineer and executive manager on a diverse range of projects in the public sector.
We look through the eyes of many

Recognizing and promoting diversity means having an appreciation for difference. At Wells Fargo, we welcome and value the insights and perspectives drawn from unique life experiences. It is those distinctive viewpoints that provide us with the fresh thinking we need to help all our customers reach their financial goals.

We are proud to be part of LABJ Diversity and Inclusion Summit.
Amber Meshack is the director of the new Business, Jobs, & Social Responsibility division at Los Angeles World Airports. The division is responsible for leading efforts to maximize business and job opportunities for local, diverse firms and workers. For the past two years, she worked on the Landslide Access Modernization Program (LAMP) at LAX, where she managed executive operations and strategic projects, including developing the local hire, workforce, and small, local, and disadvantaged business contracting requirements for the $4.9B Automated People Mover project. Prior to working at LAWA, Meshack worked at the City of Los Angeles’s Department, leading strategic planning and policy for the Consolidated Plan, the investment strategy for community development funds.

Michael Ormonde was named Wells Fargo Los Angeles Region bank president in November of 2017. Ormonde oversees over 1,200 Wells Fargo team members at approximately 56 branches across the cities of Los Angeles, Beverly Hills, Santa Monica and South Bay territories. A 21-year financial services veteran, Ormonde has spent his career-serving customers in San Francisco, Greater Philadelphia, Delaware, and Washington D.C. regions. He has held several leadership positions including district manager and area president. Prior to being named Los Angeles Region Bank President, he served as Region Bank President for the Washington D.C. region. An active member in his community, Ormonde currently serves on the board of directors of the Los Angeles LGBT Center.

Akash Sehgal leads Green Hasson Janks’ Tax Practice and has a deep expertise in multistate income and franchise tax, sales and use tax and credits and incentives. He has more than 20 years of tax experience, and prior to joining Green Hasson Janks in 2012, worked at two Big Four firms in Los Angeles and Seattle. Sehgal is also the lead tax partner in the firm’s Food and Beverage Practice and works with a number of beverage manufacturers operating both in California and on a multistate basis. Sehgal also leads the firm’s research and development credit outsourcing initiative and works closely with specialized research and development credit firms. He enjoys helping clients grow their businesses and assisting them on complex state and local tax issues.

Mercy Steenwyk is the President & CEO of ForensisGroup. Through a deep sense of purpose, clarity of mission and the power of a company culture based on core values, Mercy Steenwyk, founder and CEO of ForensisGroup, has led the nationwide expert consulting firm for nearly 30 years. ForensisGroup brings the best minds in the country to those who need to find out what really happened when things go wrong. ForensisGroup brings the science in the legal system to uncover the truth, prevent damages and positively change human experience in the world. Social justice through our service is the company’s social purpose and responsibility. Steenwyk approaches her professional and personal life with a dedication to learning and staying inspired while helping others do the same, creating your own future and contributing to the greater good while making business a solution to the challenges of society today.

Phillip A. Washington manages a total balanced budget of $5.2 billion for FY20, is responsible for overseeing between $198.520 billion in capital projects, and provides oversight of an agency with nearly 11,000 employees that transports 2.2 million boarding passengers daily riding on a fleet of 2,000 clean-air buses and six rail lines. Metro is the lead transportation planning, programming and financing agency for LA County. As such, it is a major construction agency that oversees bus, rail, highway and other mobility-related infrastructure projects – together representing the largest modern public works program in North America. Washington was a key leader in the 2016 successful effort to pass a new half-cent sales tax in Los Angeles County, which garnered 71.15% voter approval.

Dr. Lois M. Shelton earned a Ph.D. in Business Economics from Harvard University and is a professor in the Department of Management at the California State University, Northridge. She is also an associate editor at the International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research, and was recently named a Justin G. Longenecker Fellow by the United States Association for Small Business and Entrepreneurship. A former business executive with nearly ten years of experience in diverse fields such as management consulting and real estate development, she teaches entrepreneurship and strategy at the graduate and undergraduate levels. Her research interests include ethnic and women’s entrepreneurship, industry and social structure, and the work/organizational interface.

Stephanie Wiggins was named CEO of Metrolink by a unanimous vote of the Board of Directors in December 2018. Wiggins assumed leadership in January 2019 and leads the 225-employee strong commuter railroad with a budget of $793 million. As CEO, Wiggins directs an agency that operates a commuter rail network on seven routes across a six-county, 538 route-mile system. Wiggins has held high-level positions at three of the five-member agencies that comprise Metrolink and is well-known as a customer-focused leader who finds solutions from a regional perspective. Wiggins’ vision for the agency is to create a value-added expectation by prioritizing a customer-first orientation with three pillars to provide an outstanding customer experience: safety and security, an integrated system, and modernizing business practices.
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DERRICK COLEMAN
Managing Director, Creative Financial Staffing (a subsidiary of Green Hasson Janks)

LIZBETH NEVAREZ
Managing Director and Nonprofit Tax Practice Leader, Green Hasson Janks

AKASH SEHГAL
Partner and Tax Practice Leader, Green Hasson Janks

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Leveraging Diversity to Create Your Dream Team

By LOIS M. SHELTON, PHD.

Congratulations! You won the prize account, got the green light for a new program, inked a big partnership deal or landed that coveted promotion. As you toast this latest accomplishment with family and friends, you know that you’ll need a high-powered team working with you to achieve your objectives. So how do you start?

Studies demonstrate and bottom-line results prove that diverse teams out-perform individuals and more homogeneous groups in decision-making, creativity and problem-solving. Why? Because teams comprised of people with different experiences, backgrounds and perspectives possess greater cognitive diversity, which in turn generates more comprehensive collective intelligence. Greater cognitive diversity produces a broader base of possibilities, ideas and solutions. As diverse team members discuss, debate and collaborate on these options, they develop a more robust shared acumen or collective intelligence than more homogeneous groups, which can be prone to groupthink. This robust collective intelligence is a key source of competitive advantage, or the “diversity dividend.”

Instead of relying solely on chance, you can take a number of steps to get that high-powered diverse team in place. Diversity comes in many forms and understanding what types of diversity you need enhances the likelihood of your success. Here’s one approach that has yielded success.

First, lay the groundwork by:

• Setting Specific Goals – What results do you desire – increased revenues, lower costs, an expanded market, greater brand/company awareness, higher profits, more community engagement or some combination of the above? Specific goals aid you in spotting high potential team members and in giving direction to your team.

• Determining Key Knowledge and Skills Required – What kinds of “know-what” and “know-how” do your team members need to achieve these goals? Knowledge can be discipline-based (e.g. accounting, finance, human resources, marketing, entrepreneurship) and cultural (e.g. language skills, ethnic background, international experience). Skills can be technical (e.g. computer applications or coding, statistics, order optimization) and softer (e.g. communication, emotional intelligence, networking).

• Identifying Critical Audiences – Who will be impacted by those goals? Look internally and externally at both upside and down sides. Who will be your beneficiaries or customers? Who is likely to oppose or be threatened? Who do you need as partners and supporters? Who do you need for buy-in and implementation of your goals?

Second, select team members. Not only will you want highly capable individuals who bring key knowledge and skills, and have links to critical internal and external audiences, but also a mix of persons with reflecting different inherent and acquired diversity.

• Inherent Diversity – involves traits from birth such as gender, ethnicity and race.

• Acquired Diversity – involves traits gained from experience such as living abroad, working in various industries or actively participating in other communities.

Why? Because inherent and acquired diversity causes persons to have different lived experiences. These different lived experiences result in varied viewpoints and unique perceptions which can yield greater cognitive diversity and collective intelligence.

Finally, consider whether your candidates already successfully worked in one or more diverse teams. This experience indicates that they understand how to value and appreciate the unique backgrounds of others and possess the compassion and acceptance to break down barriers and to amplify typically unheard voices.

As a leader in educating diverse populations, the Nazarian College of Business and Economics at CSUN is superbly equipped to assist business leaders and executives in maximizing their “diversity dividends”. Employers regularly extend the ability of Nazarian college graduates to work effectively in teams as well as their superb business training.

The Nazarian College ranks among the top 5% of business schools globally by virtue of its AACSB accreditation and is recognized as one of the Best US Business Schools by the Princeton Review. With over 8,000 majors and 400 minors, the College offers one of the 10 largest undergraduate business programs in the nation as well as graduate business programs lauded by US News & World Report, CEO Magazine, the Accounting Degree Review, as well as other esteemed agencies. As part of CSUN, which is a certified Hispanic, Asian American, Native American and Pacific Islander serving university, the Nazarian College student body boasts ethnicities, races, and nations from around the world as well as members of all socio-economic strata.

A curriculum steeped in collaboration and teamwork insures that Nazarian College graduates at both the undergraduate and Master’s levels are experienced in working with persons from a wide variety of backgrounds to achieve demanding, time-sensitive goals. Nearly 70% of upper division undergraduate classes require one or more team projects, and many of these teams are randomly assigned to guarantee that students have the opportunity to work with and learn from others with different ideas, beliefs and approaches. Since class sizes are small, distinguished faculty are readily available to offer guidance and advice as students navigate the challenges of conflicting mindsets and sensitivities different from their own.

This active, team-based learning also occurs outside the classroom via engagement with practitioners, and hands-on experiences through consulting projects, internships, competitions, international excursions, and incubator/accelerator programs. This pragmatic yet rigorous approach gives Nazarian College students the total package: 1) state-of-the-art business knowledge and skills, 2) enhanced acquired diversity from working with a variety of inherently diverse people, and 3) strong leadership and team player capabilities through numerous teamwork experiences.

The Nazarian College, and its students, faculty, staff, and alumni stand ready to partner with you to help you form your dream teams. Through our expertise in training and developing diverse individuals and teams, we aim to partner with Los Angeles businesses in leveraging the vast assortment of people, cultures and ideas in the larger metropolitan area, and to maximize the competitive advantage of diversity.

Lois M. Shelton, PhD, is a Professor of Management at the David Nazarian School of Business and Economics at CSUN.
Diversity and inclusion are cornerstones of the realtor profession and the Greater Los Angeles REALTORS® (GLAR) is dedicated to making an industry-wide impact.

"Just like our wonderful city of LA, we are truly a diverse organization across all categories. We are determined to represent that to our members, clients, local, state, and national governments/organizations," said Ryan Ole Hass, president of the GLAR. "I could not be prouder of the direction our Association is headed."

“Our culture is critical to our growth and success,” added CEO Marty Nash. “As industry professionals, we lead by example, we are transparent, we listen before we act, we are results driven, and we give back.”

Historically, realtors agree to adopt and abide by the National Association of Realtors Code of Ethics, and to adhere to the highest standard of business practices. The Fair Housing Act of 1968 is a fundamental core value of realtors. The Act protects people from discrimination when they are renting or buying a home, getting a mortgage, seeking housing assistance, or engaging in other housing-related activities. Additional protections apply to federally-assisted housing. However, the LGBTQ+ community is not protected by the Fair Housing Act.

In May of 2018, during their midyear meetings in Washington D.C., realtors from GLAR (including Hass) and others from around the country advocated to legislators to add the LGBTQ+ community to the Fair Housing Act. As of December 2018, only 21 states and the District of Columbia prohibit discrimination in housing based on both sexual orientation and gender identity. Because the bipartisan Fair and Equal Housing Act was introduced in the House of Representatives and the Senate on April 30, 2019, HUD’s website now states, “A person who identifies as LGBTQ who has experienced (or is about to experience) discrimination under any of these bases may file a complaint with HUD. HUD is committed to investigating violations of the Fair Housing Act against all individuals regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.” Until this is a Federal Law, however, the LGBTQ+ community may continue to be discriminated against in a majority of U.S. States.

"Diversity and inclusion are at the core of the business of all realtors, and it is the role of our organization to reflect and represent those values,” said Nash.

Diversity in L.A. can be defined on more than race, religion, or any of the standard definitions. The massive variety of the countless neighborhoods in L.A. create another layer that many Angelenos add to their identity.

Being conscious of this phenomenon, the leadership team developed logos for not only the five cities but also an additional 24 neighborhoods served by the members within their boundaries. Their members and affiliates represent more than 100 countries worldwide.

"These logos are badges of honor and pride for those that live, work, and represent the amazing neighborhoods throughout our great City," said Hass.

Hass also happens to be the first Hispanic president and Nash is the first Black CEO in the 117-year history of GLAR.

"Our culture is critical to our growth and success,” added CEO Marty Nash. “As industry professionals, we lead by example, we are transparent, we listen before we act, we are results driven, and we give back.”

Besides advocacy, which is something GLAR has made a priority, the organization also participates in events small and large throughout the communities it serves. In June, GLAR will have its largest presence yet during West Hollywood’s Gay Pride Parade, inviting fellow realtors and friends from all over California to join them.

NAR surpassed 1.4 million members in 2019, remaining the largest trade organization in the country, of which GLAR is a proud and active part.

Information for this article was provided by the Greater Los Angeles REALTORS®. For more information, visit greaterlarealtors.com.

MARCH 16, 2020
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WE ARE PROUD TO SUPPORT
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Innovative mentoring programs offer a holistic approach to successful business outcomes for all parties. It recognizes diverse educational or experiential needs, specialized talent, and differing professional and geographical perspectives. It works toward a collaborative initiative to meet the unique goals and objectives in every business case. The case studies below are examples of a more meaningful and deeper level of mentorship that engages and encourages success so that both the mentors and mentees achieve maximum value and benefit.

**HNTB CORP.**

At HNTB, inclusion, diversity and mentoring are not just goals; they are inherent in our culture. We value the benefits a talented and diverse workforce brings to our firm, our clients and partners. Since the firm’s founding over a century ago, we are proud that our diversity, mentoring and industry initiatives have not only made HNTB successful, but have helped propel our partners to business success.

Regular engagement in a variety of formal and informal educational and mentorship programs helps to continuously develop and engage women, minority enterprises and small businesses. Tangible benefits can be seen in employee satisfaction, enhanced productivity and increased profits. Building long lasting, mutually beneficial business relationships directly contributes to the success of both our firms, and ultimately benefits our clients. Across the country and in Southern California, HNTB provides a variety of innovative coaching and mentorship programs.

**CITYWORKS DESIGN**

Lisa Padilla, AIA, LEED AP, is founder and principal of Cityworks Design in Pasadena, California. Her firm specializes in urban design and architecture with a special focus on public realm and transportation projects. As a small business, she is sought out for her specialized expertise by larger firms who serve as prime contractors on major complex transportation projects.

Padilla said she gained perspective as well as valuable insight on how HNTB’s inclusion and coaching program helps develop and mentor the next generation workforce and elevate the opportunities for small business partners.

“HNTB, at a very basic level, recognizes the value of teaming with small, minority businesses. I believe absolutely at their core, they see the value and benefits that smaller, more specialized firms can bring, which I believe is a key foundation for a strong partnership,” said Padilla.

“Another wonderful thing HNTB does is highlight our firm’s unique strengths and expertise and showcase how we can be an asset to the core team,” she added. “For some large transportation projects, our firm provides specialty services that we are known for, including community-based design, urban design and active transportation. This really heightens our value on a team and demonstrates to clients that they are getting the best team for the project.”

It is not always the larger firm taking the lead as Padilla learned in her firm’s experience. Partnerships between firms can do a much better job of customizing and focusing the services that can add value for clients.

“A big firm might not know of all the expertise and specialty services we can provide. Sometimes, firm leaders propose specialized skills that we can bring, in addition to our core capabilities. These partnerships make the entire team stronger. With our firms working together, clients can see a perfect combination of talent and get the best of both worlds,” added Padilla.

“We may be small in size but can be big in presence and really powerful in impact and service to the client.”

**VICUS PLANNING**

Vicus Planning is another one of HNTB’s small business partners. Vicus specializes in planning, design, and environmental consulting services under the leadership of Monica Villalobos, principal and owner. With over 15 years of experience in the planning and transportation field, her passion and commitment are evidenced by her firm’s dedication to client service, delivery of high-quality products, and innovative solutions.

“Working with HNTB provides opportunities for us to work as part of a collaborative team, each of us bringing our own expertise, experience and perspective to large infrastructure projects,” said Villalobos. “Together, we can strategize on how to best meet the client’s requirements and prepare for conversations and strategies, especially when HNTB has had a previous history with the client. I appreciate that there is mutual respect for each of our roles in the project delivery process.”

Villalobos also shared that building trust in your teams is an essential element of any productive coaching or mentoring relationship. She added, “HNTB kept us informed and involved – always proactively reaching out, having us be an active and engaged part of the team as we worked together to develop integrated and innovative ideas and recommendations. I feel our relationship was very inclusive and productive, truly a team effort that resulted in delivering excellent results for our clients.”

**SUENRAM & ASSOCIATES, INC.**

Founded in late 2018, Suenram & Associates, Inc. is a Los Angeles-based small business civil engineering design and consulting services firm working with public agencies and private developers. As President and CEO, Katie Suenram operates her firm under the principles of integrity, follow-through, and hard work. She has earned the position as one of L.A.’s newest, woman-owned businesses with an opportunity to connect communities by delivering quality engineering services. Her firm is currently involved in a more formal mentoring initiative with HNTB and L.A. Metro.

“As a relatively new firm, we are excited for the opportunity to partner with HNTB in L.A. Metro’s mentor-protege program. In this fast-paced industry with ever-evolving technological, economic and political landscapes, it is proven that change is constant,” said Suenram. “The opportunity to learn from, observe and be mentored by a firm that has more than a hundred years of experience and success, is exciting. HNTB’s ability to withstand an evolving industry and maintain corporate sustainability contributes towards our confidence to build a strong foundation with solid core values and position Suenram & Associates for long-term success.”

**SUENRAM & ASSOCIATES, INC.**

The successful outcomes from these partners is an inspiration to other firms to seek out and embrace opportunities to develop their own innovative mentoring relationships. HNTB is committed to highlighting the positive impacts as well as the transformative power small or minority business enterprises can achieve when collaborating for the greater benefit of all parties.

Information for this article was submitted by HNTB Corporation, an employee-owned infrastructure solutions firm serving public and private owners and contractors. Celebrating 106 years of service in the United States and California, HNTB continues to grow in size and service offerings to clients with eight California offices that employ approximately 320 full-time California professionals.
Inclusive Leadership Fosters Inclusive Excellence

By DR. SHARONI DENISE LITTLE and TONISHA JESTER

Many organizations grapple with effectively ensuring that diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging are evident within their organizational practices, values, and strategy. An essential aspect of creating and sustaining a diverse, inclusive, and competitive organization is the practice of intentional and authentic leadership. Authentic leaders, those who understand their purpose, recognize how that purpose advances the organization, practice solid values, and model integrity, devise collaborative organizational systems and structures that engage and value all members.

Within organizations, leaders shape, inform, and reinforce an organization’s culture and climate — both the tacit and explicit social order of an organization which shapes attitudes and behaviors. While it is true that many organizations espouse their commitment to inclusion and belonging — an environment where all members feel respected, valued, and supported — their bias organizational culture and practices often fail to establish meaningful, sustainable value all members.

Inclusive Leadership fosters leadership skills in myriad ways, including providing student fellowships, professional development, and mentoring. A key initiative to confront the harmful effects of unconscious or implicit bias we initiate mindfulness series so that students could not only be aware of bias but could also recognize having cognitive strategies to disrupt entrenched thoughts and behaviors that perpetuate marginalizing and stereotypical narratives. To build on our outstanding curricular offerings and personal development programs, we support student participation at professional conferences and national case competitions through travel fellowships.

We continue to focus our leadership on vital issues, including ensuring gender parity and access equity in business schools today and boardrooms tomorrow. Among our efforts to recognize and advance women leaders and thrive are events such as the MBA Everyone’s Business Global Case Competition, sponsored by the USC Marshall Graduate Women in Business and the Marshall Business Competition Program. Notably, USC Marshall was the first major business school to reach gender parity in a full-time MBA program — a significant step forward toward leveling the playing field in other business schools and in corporate boardrooms nationwide.

In addition, we support a broad array of diverse student groups such as Marshall Pride, the Black Business Student Association, the Graduate Asian Business Society, the Latino Business Student Association, SpectrumSC, and the Association of Latino Professionals for America. In the past year, we also celebrated the reestablishment of the USC chapters of the National Organization of Black Accountants and the Latino Business Student Association. Our community efforts include campus-wide events like our “Community Conversations” series, that included an Athletes and Activist Nina Simone followed by a Fireside Chat with Ambassador Attallah Shabazz (the eldest daughter of Dr. Betty Shabazz and Malcolm X Shabazz). Other signature events included, USC Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Week, and Marshall-focused gatherings such as International Women’s Day and the Forward Summit, a professional leadership conference organized by the Black Graduate Business Leaders and the Latino Management and Business Association student organizations. We are also proud to partner with the Leslie and William McMorrow Neighborhood Academic Initiative (NAI), a USC signature college preparatory program to support students from South and East Los Angeles gain college acceptance.

Inclusive Leadership fosters inclusive excellence. While we value our existing diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging efforts, we acknowledge the importance of growth, action, and transparency. Fight On!

Dr. Sharon Denise Little is Associate Dean/Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer and a Professor of Clinical Business Communication at USC Marshall School of Business. Tonisha Jester is Senior Associate Director, Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at USC Marshall School of Business.
Federal Taxes and Same-Sex Marriage: How Should You File?

By MARC ACKERMAN

Note: This byline is part of a special series in celebration of diversity & inclusion. Here, Marc Ackerman, private wealth financial advisor at Wells Fargo Advisors, shares tips for same-sex couples filing federal income taxes. Marc has dedicated 20 years to delivering independent counsel to clients. He is passionate about helping others and enjoysknowing his clients are prepared for critical financial events in their lives. Additionally, Marc helps families integrate their unique values into their wealth plans and focuses on philanthropic planning and social impact investing.

TODAY’S CHOICES

Same-sex married couples can file as married, either jointly or separately, at both the federal and state level. But does simply checking a different box on your tax forms guarantee a better outcome? Not necessarily.

If you and your partner earn roughly the same amount of money, filing jointly could bump you into a higher tax bracket. On the contrary, if one spouse earns little or no income, and the other is the primary wage earner, filing jointly may result in paying less taxes. In other words, by tying the knot, you may wind up owing Uncle Sam less than if you remained single.*

DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIPS AND CIVIL UNIONS

Although a handful of states recognize domestic partnerships and civil unions, the IRS does not. So, while these designations may offer some of the same rights and responsibilities available to married couples, it’s only at a state level and on a state-by-state basis.

TAX BENEFITS THAT APPLY TO ALL

Same-sex married couples grappling with the potential effects of marriage on your tax situation—and help you and your partner to answer questions such as who incurs deductible expenses, who can claim children as dependents, and what tax preferences you might qualify for can also help you gauge how your marital status might impact your income tax and your financial future as a married couple.

This article was written for Wells Fargo Advisors and provided courtesy of Marc Ackerman, Financial Advisor in Los Angeles at (310) 444-6515. Sources:

"Answers to Frequently Asked Questions for Registered Domestic Partners and Individuals in Civil Unions," IRS.gov

"Tax Topics: Marriage Penalty," Tax Policy Center

"Same-Sex Couples Still Face Tax Nightmares," by Blake Ellis, CNN Money, posted March 5, 2014

"How Gay Marriage Became a Constitutional Right," posted July 1, 2015, The Atlantic

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WE CAN HELP

Wells Fargo Advisors can help you lay the groundwork for your financial future. Our firm is qualified to assist LGBT couples with key financial issues affecting same-sex spouses and domestic partners.

*Our firm does not provide legal or tax advice.
The Importance of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

By DONELLA WILSON

While diversity, equity and inclusion have become buzzwords in recent years, the definitions and what they mean and how they apply to each company or organization can differ. For example, there is no clear definition of equity, even in the nonprofit sector. According to a recent whitepaper from LA-based accounting firm Green Hasson Janks titled The Give and the Get: The Future of Philanthropy, equity helps serve the most basic needs of nonprofits, and it is a way for nonprofits to create messaging that can be used to help match grantors with nonprofits.

The concept of diversity and opportunity for growth is not specific to nonprofits. Even with the best of intentions, equity still falls short — in the nonprofit sector, as well as in the workplace.

DIVERSITY DRIVES INNOVATION IN THE WORKPLACE

According to Harvard Business Review, research found “leaders who give diverse voices equal airtime are nearly twice as likely as others to unleash value-driving insights.”

Critical insights are what drive business forward. In today’s rapidly changing economic environment, organizations that cannot innovate quickly enough to keep up will struggle to find success. Having the best and brightest minds may sound like an ideal strategy, but if all of those minds think and behave the same way, they will fall into the same expected patterns.

Diversity in the workplace has been a point of discussion for decades, younger generations are making it more important than ever. Millennials, Gen Z and Centennials are considered critical to the innovation process. In fact, a 2018 Pew Research Center analysis of Census Bureau data finds that the “post-Millennial” generation is already the most racially and ethnically diverse generation.

These generations have basic expectations of living and working among diverse populations, so in order to hire and retain them, employers need to think about diversity strategically.

Implementing this strategy starts from the top, with leadership education. According to the largest human resources professional society, SHRM, employee differences should be embraced and goals communicated and measured. Daily experiences with coworkers are more telling than anything else, so staying in tune with how daily meetings are conducted can provide helpful insights.

Applying this insight correctly is critical to optimizing business growth, as well as the personal growth of employees. As part of a special report on diversity, science and innovation, a Scientific American article titled “How Diversity Makes Us Smarter” suggests that diversity helps people be more innovative, creative, diligent and hard working. Interacting with individuals who are different forces group members to prepare better, to anticipate alternative viewpoints and to expect that reaching consensus will take effort.

Diversity is the cornerstone of the larger global economy. More than ever, businesses are being accomplished on a global scale. Embracing cultural diversity should be seen as an opportunity for growth, and companies will have to be able to leverage their ability to adapt and innovate in order to be successful.

MORE THAN A QUOTA

Diversity and inclusion means more than meeting a quota for race or gender. It promotes respect, acceptance, teamwork and innovation despite differences. When different minds collaborate to achieve a common goal, everyone wins.

A study conducted by the Center for Effective Philanthropy interviewed over 200 nonprofit CEOs. 75 percent stated that it was important to have staff diversity, but just 36 percent said their staff was actually diverse.

65 percent of nonprofit executives have acknowledged the need for higher diversity but know that they have not prioritized it.

Donella Wilson, CPA, leads the Green Hasson Janks nonprofit practice and has more than 25 years of public accounting experience, providing audit, accounting and special project services. She is a member of the board of the Down-Town Women’s Center and works exclusively in the nonprofit sector.

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It's a Fact: Disability Inclusion is Just Good Business!

Anyone who has looked for a job knows that the task is often fraught with anxiety … and it can be even more challenging for people with disabilities. Disability remains a prevalent barrier to employment for the estimated 61 million people (one in three households) with a disability in the U.S. According to a 2019 U.S. Department of Labor report, just 19.1% of people with disabilities are employed, versus 65.9% of people without disabilities.

Yet the fact is that industry reports consistently rate workers with disabilities above average based on performance, safety, attendance and turnover (8% vs. 45% in the general population per the Association of People Supporting Employment First). Customers with disabilities and their families, friends and associates represent a $3 trillion market segment. Among all customers, 87% say they prefer to patronize businesses that hire employees with disabilities. And nearly two-thirds of consumers are “belief-driven buyers,” who choose, switch, avoid or boycott a brand based on its stand on societal issues (2018 Edelman Earned Brand Report).

Economic benefits to the employer are clear … so what’s the problem? “It’s about managing unconscious bias and understanding what inclusion is,” said Catharine Crow, Chief People Officer, overseeing human resources for Easterseals Southern California (ESSC), one of the largest nonprofit providers of disability services in the state.

“People may not even be aware of what their biases are,” continued Crow. “Once employers look beyond the disability, or any other singularly defining characteristic, they learn what an individual has to offer. It’s about being open to people from all perspectives, demographics, genders, ethnicities, orientations, experience levels, educational backgrounds, cultures, neighborhoods. It’s about looking at a person in their entirety and creating a new lens for perceiving, joining with and inviting into our communities.”

Instead of a bunch of people who all act and look the same, you have differential skill-sets, outlooks, approaches and ways of processing that make a team stronger, bringing varied insights to cultures, systems, processes, even policies, to make sure everyone has an opportunity to participate and succeed. It makes the organization that much more resilient and successful.

With a mission to “Change the way the world defines and views disability by making profound, positive differences in people’s lives every day,” ESSC’s WorkFirst service focuses on meaningful employment. Translation? A person with a disability is working in a job of their choice, in an inclusive setting alongside co-workers who do not have a disability and who receives salary/benefits comparable to non-disabled workers doing the same job.

WorkFirst is a customized employment service that assists individuals with disabilities on a one-on-one basis to find a job or start a small business, based on talents, interests and abilities. But customized employment is nothing new. Parents work alternative or shared shifts; highly specialized doctors consult via the Internet; and executives telecommute.

Easterseals also takes the time to learn about a business partner’s needs to successfully match a qualified individual to a specific job opportunity. One persistent myth that creates a barrier is the anticipated high cost of accommodations that meet the Americans with Disability Act (ADA). Yet most accommodations (if needed) cost less than $500 and, based on a national survey from the Cornell University Employment and Disability Institute in 2012, employers on average see a $28-plus return on investment for each dollar spent.

ESSC’s WorkFirst service has supported thousands of people to successfully find meaningful employment in a variety of fields. From customer service to social media specialist, florist, dog groomer, dance teacher, baker, sous chef, sports writer, theme park worker, usher and more.

Ultimately, inclusion is not only good for the individual and the business, but for society as a whole. Employment equals self-sufficiency, including the ability to pay rent or buy a home, patronize stores, pay taxes and contribute economically to our communities and nation.

Building an inclusive society in which everyone is valued, encouraged and supported in pursuit of their goals and dreams is not just the right thing to do … it clearly just makes good business sense.

Information for this article was provided by Easterseals Southern California (ESSC), one of the largest nonprofit providers of disability services in the state. Learn how you can help build a future where everyone is 100% Included and 100% empowered at easterseals.com/southerncal.
Diversity in Health Care: The Key to Better Health Outcomes in Minority Communities

By JOHN BAACKES

To improve health outcomes and reduce health disparities, it is critical for the health care industry to be as diverse as the population it serves. Unfortunately, that is not the case in the United States. For example, Hispanics make up more than 18 percent of the population, but just six percent of physicians. African Americans make up more than 13 percent of the population in the United States, but account for fewer than five percent of the physicians.

So why does this matter?

Lack of diversity in health care is a problem. It is linked to poor health outcomes in minority communities. An African American woman with breast cancer is 67 percent more likely to die from the disease than a white woman. Hispanic and African American youth are at greater risk of dying from diabetes than whites. Creating a more diverse health care work force is one way to tackle these health disparities.

Recent studies have shown that greater diversity among health professionals is associated with improved access to care, greater patient satisfaction, and better patient-provider communication. It’s understandable that people might feel more comfortable seeing physicians who share their language, racial or cultural background. That comfort level can be what ensures that people seek regular medical care, and don’t wait until they are forced into emergency care.

In 2018, L.A. Care Health Plan launched Elevating the Safety Net, a $155 million, five-year initiative to recruit highly qualified primary care physicians (PCPs) into the Los Angeles County safety net. The initiative was prompted by a growing PCP shortage – a shortage that is worse in low-income and minority communities. Safety net clinics and practices often have a difficult time competing against universities and major health systems which can pay more.

L.A. Care’s initiative gives safety net facilities a fighting chance. The initiative offers grants to physicians and practices to use for salary subsidies, sign-on bonuses, and/or relocation costs to recruit new physicians to the Los Angeles County safety net. It offers loan repayment grants to those new physicians to relieve medical school debt. Since its launch, 73 new physicians have been recruited into the county’s safety net, and nearly half are minorities.

Each year, Elevating the Safety Net also provides eight full medical school scholarships to students who have expressed a desire to work in underserved communities. Our partners at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA and the Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science have done an excellent job finding those students. To date, we have awarded 16 full scholarships to a diverse group of students, including seven Hispanics and three African Americans. Knowing that such a scholarship exists could make the difference between a minority student even deciding to apply for medical school.

Racial and ethnic minority health care providers are more likely than their white peers to serve minority and other underserved communities, but medical school debt often keeps them from following their dreams. The scholarship program relieves that debt, and several of our scholars have specifically said it has freed them from having to choose a job whose chief purpose is to pay off medical school debt.

Another thing that would help minority physicians work in the Los Angeles County safety net is completing their residency in that safety net. Physicians often stay in the community where their residency occurred. For that reason, L.A. Care has added a Residency Support Program to the Elevating the Safety Net initiative. Last year, we committed more than $5 million dollars to create 14 new residency slots at five facilities in Los Angeles County.

It will take innovative initiatives like Elevating the Safety Net to make a difference in building diversity in health care. L.A. Care is proud to be on the front lines of the effort.

John Baackes is CEO of L.A. Care Health Plan.

CEO Action Reports Significant Progress in Elevating Diversity and Inclusion as a Workplace Priority

L

ate last year, at its first-ever combined gathering of CEOs, CHROs, and CDOs, CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion (CEO Action) launched “Check Your Blind Spots Tour” in conjunction to advance diversity and inclusion (Di&I) in the workplace, hosted nearly 300 signatory organizations to address complex challenges, drive progress in key impact areas and plan for the coalition’s 2020 initiatives.

“There’s a very real expectation and need for chief executives to prioritize diversity and inclusion,” said Tim Ryan, US Chairman and CEO of Deloitte and board chair for the CEO Action steering committee. “With CEOs and board chairs coming together to have the tough conversations, admit where we can do better and share where we’ve seen success, I hope this signals to stakeholders that business leaders are proactively tackling this incredibly challenging and critically important issue.”

CEOs and their board members shared how they are working together to drive accountability on cultivating talent and inclusive work cultures. This furthered an important dialogue started this past June when CEO Action marked its second anniversary with the addition of a fourth pledge commitment. The new commitment is accelerating prioritization of Di&I work through the engagement of board of directors to create and evaluate strategic Di&I action plans.

“We believe our ability to cultivate a culture that delivers on our commitment, while aligning with our corporate strategy, requires visibility and dialogue at the highest levels of our leadership, including our board,” said John Miller, President and CEO of Denny’s. “By elevating the level of dialogue around diversity and inclusion, our leadership team has gained invaluable insights into how we remain focused on executing the pledge commitments (93%) and reporting positive impact via their engagement (91%), but CEO Action is driving the evolution of organizational Di&I strategies. More than 60 percent are ‘doing something new as a result of their involvement with CEO Action’ and 91 percent are engaging their boards, driving increased accountability and visibility on this topic.

While actively supporting the dialogue around Di&I plan development and board engagement, the coalition announced the extension of key initiatives to help signatories remain focused on executing the pledge’s original commitments. Launched in 2018, CEO Action’s Check Your Blind Spots unconscious bias tour and Day of Understanding have reached more than four million people, advancing complex conversations about Di&I issues and raising awareness of blind spots. Based on feedback from signatories and their employees nationwide, CEO Action is announcing the extensions of both of these initiatives.

Originally a one-year commitment, Check Your Blind Spots unconscious bias tour is extending through June 2020 with up to an additional 50 new tour stops. Launched in 2019 with the goal of making 100 stops across the country and engaging one million people, the innovative bias tour has made 153 stops and reached more than three million workers and students. With more than 700 active requests from signatories, the tour will also release new content to find more ways to connect people and humanize Di&I conversations.

There’s a very real expectation and need for chief executives to prioritize diversity and inclusion.

First held on December 7, 2018 with engagement from 150+ signatories and more than 615,000 employees, the Day of Understanding will return in 2020 with signatories hosting employee dialogues anytime during or around the month of February. A coalition-wide initiative, the Day of Understanding directly reinforces CEO Action’s goal of advancing difficult conversations in the workplace. A first for many organizations, signatories cited the first Day of Understanding as an opportunity to build trust between employees, and as a conversation starter that led to enhancements around recruitment and retention programs.

“The Day of Understanding created a safe space to talk about topics usually avoided at work, and was an authentic and powerful experience that left many of our people feeling inspired,” said Clorox Chair and CEO Benno Preussen. “I’m glad to see this become an annual event because there’s a pull for more of these discussions at a human level. When we have these difficult conversations, it helps people get out of their comfort zones to experience personal growth.”

As Di&I continues to be a major priority for leaders across industries, CEO Action has experienced nearly 70 percent growth in signatories in 2019. Since launching, the coalition has become a unique platform for networking and enablement, realizing measurable change in how signatory organizations are tackling Di&I issues.

CEO Action provides valuable perspective, resources and insights that can help organizations evolve and grow, and a great example is their Check Your Blind Spots tour, which encouraged our workforce to mitigate unconscious bias,” said Susan Stith, Vice President, Diversity, Inclusion, Civic Affairs and the Cigna Foundation. “At Cigna, we are committed to fostering a diverse and inclusive culture where employees feel valued and able to do their best work. Helping people recognize and address personal biases will strengthen our ability to work together effectively and inclusively, in support of our mission to transform healthcare for all.”

Information for this article was provided by CEO Action.