

A ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

DIVERSITY IN RECRUITING AND HIRING ATTRACTING A BROAD RANGE OF TALENT

As organizations commit to their workforce diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, recruiting and hiring more women, people of color and other underrepresented groups has become a critical piece of the puzzle. Four business leaders shared their insights with Crain's Content Studio on the value of inclusion and how companies can attract and hire a broader range of talent while eliminating bias and improving diversity.

Why is DEI important to your organization—and to your industry?

Holly Rudnick: Our commitment to DEI helps us attract a wider array of talent and a broader range of perspectives and skills. This is crucial for ensuring a variety of things—from engagement and retention to making certain that our workforce is best suited to communicate, collaborate, innovate and ultimately execute our strategic goals. We also know we must reflect the diversity of the markets we work in and the clients we serve. By having that diversity in house, we're better poised to support those we work with. We feel it's imperative to commit to DEI, which is why we've not only made it a key strategic initiative, but have woven it into every facet of our business and culture. We

understand that it's multifaceted and ongoing and requires trust, humility and commitment at all levels of our organization.

Otto Nichols III: As a developer and design builder, we've long recognized that having a diverse and inclusive employee base provides tremendous value in our ability to deliver creative solutions for our clients and to perform successfully in all parts of the country. That value directly affects our bottom line. The diversity in our teams reinforces our culture of curiosity and open mindedness that we seek as an enterprise. We operate in such a wide range of communities and manage such a diverse construction workforce that a commitment to DEI is a requirement to remain effective.

Tauhidah Shakir: We want employees to feel welcomed, respected, safe and encouraged to bring their whole selves to work. A commitment to DEI is critical to cultivating a culture and work experience that we're proud of—one where every employee has a voice.

Ashley Price: Diverse teams enable us to understand and meet the expectations of our clients and associates. DEI programs are not only essential to building a more engaged and productive workforce, but research shows that organizations with more diversity tend to outperform by having higher customer growth and sales revenue. In an industry where there's a lack of diversity, it's important that our workforce reflect the communities that we live in and serve. A diverse

workforce brings more creativity and new ideas that allow us to better understand different segments of the population, anticipate their needs and deliver on them.

What's the number one challenge you've experienced in attracting and hiring diverse candidates, and how did you deal with it?

Nichols: Our largest and ongoing challenge is simply attracting the best talent to the construction industry. Unfortunately, there aren't many schools with programs that funnel students into construction, and the ones that do typically have very few women and minority students. There's a need to introduce high school students to construction and generate excitement for the many different career opportunities in the industry before they've decided which colleges to apply for. We've found it

actively support their efforts and source potential candidates. We also use job boards targeted toward groups of diverse talent. As part of our commitment to DEI, we've also invested in a manager of talent to facilitate these efforts and support our strategic recruiting initiatives.

Price: Awareness is our biggest challenge, and we've been creative in the ways we work to increase awareness about Baird and the opportunities available within the financial services industry. We're currently expanding the number of partnerships we have with diverse organizations and universities to ensure that we're getting our name and the available careers paths in front of underrepresented groups. Attracting the next generation of talent is very important. If they don't know what opportunities are available in the industry, how will they know to consider them when declaring a major or choosing a career path to



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“OUR COMMITMENT TO DEI HELPS US ATTRACT A WIDER ARRAY OF TALENT AND A BROADER RANGE OF PERSPECTIVES AND SKILLS.” —HOLLY RUDNICK, LEOPARDO COMPANIES

helpful to partner with established community and labor organizations that share our goal. Out of necessity, we've also started the Construction Career Development Initiative to help mentor and guide students who have shown interest in the construction industry.

Rudnick: The construction industry has been facing a widespread talent shortage for some time now, and the talent pool that is available is statistically limited in diversity. Given that reality, it's important that we have a proactive recruiting strategy that begins long before we have a position to fill, and includes outreach and mentoring within the community and at the college level. We build relationships and partner with organizations ranging from nonprofits to local coalitions and certified women- and minority-owned business enterprises to

pursue after college? By getting in front of that talent early, we hope to increase visibility to the industry and knowledge about the opportunities available.

Shakir: The number one challenge I've experienced is conveying that where we're at today is not the finish line to attracting and hiring diverse candidates. We've made great strides, but recognize that there's so much to do to bring our DEI vision to life. Any thoughtful plan takes time and attention to formulate—diversity recruiting plans are no different. Finding the right milestones and metrics, and communicating your intentions is key for the organization and candidates.

In what ways has your organization's interview process become more inclusive?

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Shakir: We focus on developing diverse internal leaders to create stronger employee engagement and retention. Internal programs focused on developing underrepresented employee groups are essential to promoting diverse growth at the leadership level.

Price: We recently added councils in all areas across the firm to plan and execute department-specific initiatives such as continuing education, mentorship/sponsorship and leadership development programs to further advance efforts to retain, promote and develop diverse talent. Our associate resource groups also play an integral role in helping to provide diverse associates with the support, resources and opportunities needed for professional growth and development.

Rudnick: We're focused on creating a work environment where everyone knows they belong, that they're valued for their unique backgrounds and perspectives, and that the work they do is meaningful. Mike Leopardo, our president and CEO, regularly has conversations with employees to make sure that he understands what's important to them. This includes an array of topics directly impacting the employee experience, ranging from career development to ensuring that our total rewards offerings reflect the needs of our workforce. While we're regularly reviewing our benefits offerings, what better way to ensure they're meaningful than encouraging employees to bring forward their

Price: We partner with our hiring managers to create a structured interview process that's consistent for every candidate. This includes focusing on competencies that are specific to the role and utilizing interview scorecards to gather feedback on candidates. We're also implementing diverse interview panels which allow candidates to see a diverse representation of associates offering different perspectives during the interview process. Training is also a priority, as we want to ensure that all hiring managers and associates included in the interview process are cognizant of their biases and know how to manage them.

Shakir: Not only do we provide hiring managers with diverse candidate slates, but we also train our talent acquisition team and hiring managers about the importance of DEI in the recruiting process and how to reduce unconscious bias. We stress the importance of using

of where, how and when interviews take place, utilizing a diverse group of interview panelists, as well as inclusivity training for all those involved in conducting interviews.

Nichols: We do significant outreach to ensure that interviews and opportunities are inclusive. For example, we attend many "college day" programs to interview diverse groups of students right on campus. We'll hold intern positions open for schools with career fairs late in the hiring season, and move toward hiring for open positions only after a diverse group of candidates has been identified. To be successful, we think outside the box and recruit in non-traditional capacities. Once we've identified a pool of candidates, we'll fly all of them to our office and let them speak to a range of employees during the interview. After the interviews, we'll all gather and objectively rank students based on the attributes that will make them successful in their careers.

Association Test are helpful in identifying those.

Shakir: It's important to be transparent about your organization's demographics by sharing them internally and externally. You can do this by providing leaders with diversity dashboards that give them on-demand visibility to their department data. At Paylocity, our applicant tracking system allows recruiting teams to track, collect and analyze candidate demographic data.

Nichols: Companies have access to more data and analytical tools than they did 20 years ago, and they're extremely helpful in revealing trends

or biases that may have otherwise gone unnoticed. Frequently, just the knowledge of bias or unbalanced demographics is enough for our teams to initiate change. However, training to facilitate that change is also important; we recently hosted implicit bias training for the entire company and it's now a standard course that all new hires are required to take. We also create content for our website and social media to attract diverse candidates and promote the DEI initiatives we have in place.

After recruiting and hiring, what role does retention, development and promotion play in your DEI strategy?

"WE PARTNER WITH OUR HIRING MANAGERS TO CREATE A STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROCESS THAT'S CONSISTENT FOR EVERY CANDIDATE." — ASHLEY PRICE, BAIRD

interview guides during the hiring process with questions that are skills-focused and rooted in our core values. Additionally, we strive to have diverse interview panels, and we continue to partner with diverse job boards and posting sites. We continuously monitor and review our candidate diversity data so that our hiring process remains inclusive.

Rudnick: We're committed to making sure our entire interview process is fair, positive and consistent. Our approach begins well before we get to the interview stage and includes ensuring that our job postings are written in a way that's inclusive. We're focused on a variety of other approaches, including being mindful

What types of technologies and tools can help reduce bias?

Price: Structured interviews, diverse hiring panels, interview training and inclusive job descriptions help create consistency so that all candidates are evaluated fairly and objectively. There are platforms available to help write inclusive job descriptions that appeal to diverse audiences; these also are key to reducing bias and attracting a diverse talent pool. On the job, employees need to recognize their specific biases—we all have them—so they can take the appropriate steps to mitigate them. Tools like Harvard's Implicit

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ideas about how the company can support them. We've also overhauled our talent management strategy that's focused on career development at all levels of the organization.

Nichols: We work hard to maintain a fun and collaborative culture that encourages employees to be creative and entrepreneurial. By eliminating the rigidity found in some companies, employees have the flexibility to resolve the issues that may otherwise affect their retention. When I hired in at Clayco over 16 years ago I was told that, if I worked hard and performed well, I could go as high as I wanted in the company. That turned out to be a true statement, as we pride ourselves in promoting those who aggressively perform regardless of their background, race or gender. We provide business resource groups to employees so that they have a support network available as they continue their careers. We've also worked hard to establish a nonlinear communication structure, encouraging employees to make connections with other departments, managers and executives—providing among other benefits, alternate avenues for employees to learn about

other parts of the company. We're aware of the difficulty and challenges that diverse employees encounter and we provide mentors, resources and support as needed.

How can organizations foster a work environment where people with different backgrounds feel valued for their differences?

Price: By leveraging and celebrating differences and looking at them as strengths, we can create an environment where employees feel empowered and comfortable being their authentic selves. A key element is being intentional about increasing our cultural competence and working with people that are different from us. Baird is committed to providing these opportunities through education and development, such as mentorship, to allow associates to listen and learn from one another.

Nichols: Executives should encourage employees to collaborate and work with each other. Openly communicating and spending time together should be a top priority. We reimburse employee teams that go out

to lunch together. We've also created business resource groups to provide support to employees. For example, we have a Black employees resources group and also a network of women, known as Clayco NOW. We're not hiding our differences, but celebrating them.

Shakir: Organizations should communicate clearly and often that they not only are accepting but are actively seeking diversity of thought, experiences, background, gender, sexual orientation and more. DEI language needs to be

“... OUR APPLICANT TRACKING SYSTEM ALLOWS RECRUITING TEAMS TO TRACK, COLLECT AND ANALYZE CANDIDATE DEMOGRAPHIC DATA.”

— TAUHIDAH SHAKIR, PAYLOCITY

woven throughout every employee touchpoint to reinforce the message and the commitment to it. This can be done verbally through DEI statements, internal posts and

messages. Organizations can also create employee resource groups and/or listening sessions where employees and leaders can share experiences and learn from each other. It's also beneficial to have your DEI leader or someone from HR partner with a liaison from each department to ensure that programs, policies and business initiatives are looked at through a DEI lens.

Rudnick: Every employee has an important role in creating an inclusive culture. We all need to know that we're an important piece of the

puzzle—that our thoughts, ideas and perspectives matter, and that we have continued opportunities to develop and participate in meaningful work. We must also feel safe bringing our full, authentic selves to the table. You lead by example by consciously choosing inclusive behaviors like remaining curious, assuming positive intent, getting to know others, being open to feedback and showing humility. You must also ensure that employees feel safe to speak up when they see something that goes against company values and commitment to DEI.

How are you educating your employees about DEI?

Rudnick: This past year, we made some significant investments in our commitment to employee development, which includes a robust learning platform, as well as a new performance management process that empowers employees to use their unique skills and talents while their managers provide coaching and support. We launched a DEI steering committee that consists of a cross-functional team that's a critical component to creating a meaningful and inclusive culture. We're also redesigning our mentorship program, both internally and externally, as well as creating new employee resource groups. Little will be accomplished if employees first and foremost don't understand what DEI means and that every interaction is an opportunity to continue learning and developing.

Nichols: Executives and managers have the largest roles in showing, instead of telling, employees how

business should be done with DEI as a value; I believe this makes the largest impact. Clayco clearly outlines the best practices to incorporate DEI into company strategy and business execution processes and reinforces DEI by tracking metrics and incorporating them into employee evaluations. In addition, our executive chairman releases companywide updates addressing DEI, and also hosts smaller fireside chats.

Shakir: We use various resources such as trainings, micro learnings, speakers, fireside chats and docuseries to educate our employees about DEI.

Price: Our longstanding commitment to inclusion and diversity deepened meaningfully over the past year. Following the tragic death of George Floyd, we hosted listening sessions for our associates to have important conversations around race, privilege and inequality. It allowed them to not only learn and understand the experiences of others but to reflect on how they can play a part in driving change. We also listened to recommendations from our associates on the type of DEI training they needed and wanted to see within the firm and have provided resources to help aid them in their DEI journey. Some examples of how we've educated associates include offering trainings on cultural awareness, unconscious bias, microaggressions, and inclusive leadership. We've also hosted book clubs to spark dialogue about topics related to race.

As an employer, how do you showcase your diverse and inclusive culture?

Shakir: Internally, we post our DEI initiatives on our website and employee handbook and provide frequent updates through community posts, DEI statements and town halls. Externally, we showcase it through recruitment communications, social media posts and client webinars and podcasts.

Price: Our careers and corporate websites include stories from a diverse group of associates who share their experiences and why they enjoy working at Baird. Our associate resource groups are another way that we showcase this. They're led and run by associates across the organization and include more than 1,000 active members. Through the work they're doing internally and within the community, we showcase how our associates are coming together to drive change.



ABOUT THE PANELISTS



OTTO NICHOLS III is an executive vice president and shareholder at Clayco, which specializes in the “art and science of

building” with fast track, efficient solutions for industrial, commercial, institutional and residential projects across the U.S. Since joining the company in 2004, he has led large construction projects totaling more than \$1.25 billion, including aviation, office, health care, laboratory and financial facilities nationwide. He holds a master’s degree in construction management from Washington University and a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering from the University of Missouri.

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ASHLEY PRICE is the diversity talent advisor for the private wealth management business at Baird, a multinational independent investment bank and financial services company. She is responsible for planning, developing, coordinating and executing

recruitment strategies and initiatives to attract candidates from a wide range of backgrounds to increase and improve diversity within the business and at Baird. She holds a master’s degree in human resources and a bachelor’s degree in economics—both from Marquette University—and a professional certification from the Society for Human Resources Management.

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HOLLY RUDNICK is vice president of human resources at Leopardo Companies, a 44-year-old construction company with offices in Hoffman Estates and Chicago. She leads the company’s strategic human resources department, advancing its people and culture infrastructure. She has nearly 20 years of strategic

human resources experience across a wide range of industries, including construction, health care, retail and manufacturing. She holds a bachelor’s degree in human services and psychology from Kendall College and professional certifications from the Human Resources Certification Institute and the Society for Human Resources Management.

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TAUHIDAH SHAKIR is vice president of human resources and chief diversity officer at Paylocity, a Schaumburg-based provider of cloud-

based HR and payroll software solutions, where she develops strategies and programs that foster a diverse and equitable workplace. She has more than 20 years of experience providing strategic HR support, developing DEI programs and coaching leaders across all areas of the organization. She holds a bachelor’s degree in organization behavior from the University of North Texas, and certifications from the Human Resources Certification Institute and the Fowler School of Business and Executive Coaching.

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Nichols: Internally, we praise positive performance during project reviews and employee performance reviews. Externally, we showcase strategic initiatives on our company websites and highlight daily wins on our social media pages. The best showcase, however, is encouraging our subcontractors and employees to publicly highlight their own experiences. There’s no better way to validate the effort we put into DEI than to have our employees and project partners share their experiences working with Clayco.

Rudnick: For Leopardo, it’s about letting our actions speak for themselves. Our commitments to DEI are not motivated by anything other than truly wanting to be a remarkable place for all to work and for our customers to partner with. We recognize that companies are feeling increasing pressure to speak out publicly on social issues—especially those rooted in DEI. To truly demonstrate and encourage progress you must be fully committed to doing the work behind the scenes. That’s where our focus has been and we showcase our diverse and inclusive culture through the progress we’ve been making.

“WE’RE AWARE OF THE DIFFICULTY AND CHALLENGES THAT DIVERSE EMPLOYEES ENCOUNTER AND WE PROVIDE MENTORS, RESOURCES AND SUPPORT AS NEEDED.”

—OTTO NICHOLS III, CLAYCO

What advice do you have for organizations looking to step up their DEI efforts?

Nichols: The first step is to confirm that your efforts are genuine. It’s

disingenuous to recruit and hire people under the guise of DEI but not truly embrace the concept. Those efforts must be made a priority and pushed from the very top of the organization. For example, Bob Clark, our executive chairman and founder, personally reinforces how important our DEI initiatives are and how we want the company to be seen in the community. Lastly, engage and listen to your employees. Younger employees will communicate their expectations more openly, but the more mature employees can more easily ensure that the efforts integrate within the company culture.

Shakir: Make sure you have dedicated resources focused on your DEI initiatives. Create a DEI program that has ongoing initiatives, such as an internship program and list of diversity suppliers that support your local community. I also recommend providing leaders and employees with a set curriculum and training and creating milestones that can be tracked throughout the year.

Rudnick: DEI cannot be exclusively owned by human resources. Every employee has a responsibility to understand the company’s commitment to DEI and

do their part to incorporate inclusive behaviors into how they show up and interact with their peers, customers and their communities. DEI is not an event, but rather an ongoing process that requires commitment,

humility and curiosity, as well as a growth mindset. Be prepared for some uncomfortable and candid conversations about where you are as an organization and where you should be. Also, never underestimate the power of storytelling. I’m a firm believer that everyone has a story to tell and that we learn much more when we’re actively listening to what people have to say.

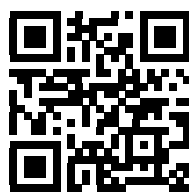
Price: Talk to your employees. It’s important to understand their experiences and any challenges they may be facing. Then look for trends, especially within different demographic groups. Once you hear from your employees and identify areas of improvement, take action and measure progress along the way. Show them that you’re committed to addressing their concerns and listening to their solutions to create

an environment where employees feel heard, seen and valued. Additionally, every organization should analyze their recruitment, selection, promotion, compensation, development and training processes, which will bring to light any systematic issues that need to be addressed internally.

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