

# PUBLICATION

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## Asurion Makes Diversity & Inclusion a Top Priority

Authors: Nakimuli O. Davis-Primer  
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Nashville-based global tech care company Asurion received the Nashville Tech Council's 2018 Diversity Game Changer award for "making an outstanding and successful effort to improve and promote cultural diversity through collaborative processes." But the company's recognition didn't stop there. Asurion has also received a perfect score on the Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index for two years in a row, been named one of the *Forbes* 2020 Best Employers for Diversity, DiversityInc's Noteworthy recognition in 2019 and 2020, and made Diversity Inc's Top 50 Specialty List, ranking #10 for Employee Resource Groups.

Asurion recognizes that attracting, developing, understanding and retaining diverse talent is crucial to the success of the business and its employees. The company assembles diverse teams and encourages a variety of perspectives to ensure its products and services deliver what its customers want.

Here are a few other ways that Asurion has demonstrated the importance of diversity and inclusion (D&I) efforts:

- **commUnity:** This is Asurion's D&I platform that is committed to ensuring that all employees feel valued and have a genuine opportunity to thrive within the company. All initiatives fall within the EPIC framework, which stands for Empowering Employees, Promoting Partnerships, Inspiring Inclusion and Cultivating commUnity. This platform includes Asurion's Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), which seek to unify employees with common interests for networking, mentorship, problem-solving and volunteerism. Currently, Asurion has 10 ERGs comprised of almost 6,000 employees in 70+ chapters across the globe.
- **Education:** Asurion invests in educating leaders and employees about the importance of D&I as well as the existence and potential impact of bias against diverse talent in hiring and ongoing employment processes. This education initiative includes:
  - *Everyday Leadership Unconscious Bias Pop-Up:* This is a course about unconscious bias, its varied categories, and how it affects us at work. The course is facilitated through breakout activities and group interaction.
  - *Inclusive Leadership:* This learning experience introduces the principles of D&I, helps leaders explore what being "inclusive" means, and demonstrates how D&I work evolved from "compliance" training to a way for leaders and organizations to maximize productivity by creating an inclusive environment.
  - *Active Ally:* This series helps team members understand how being part of certain demographics can influence employees at work and home. Currently, Asurion has rolled out two modules focusing on allyship for the LGBT community and women. A new module focusing on allyship for Black employees will launch soon.
  - *#BeBold:* The #BeBold program is a safe space for meaningful discussion on potentially uncomfortable topics in the workplace. Past topics include #MeToo, racial equality, religious equality, the ABCs of LGBTQIA+, taking a knee during the national anthem, and more.

– **#BeBold in a Box:** This toolkit enables leaders within the company to host their own #BeBold events

- **Development:** Asurion launched Tennessee's first in-house apprenticeship for software engineers, providing existing frontline customer service, supply chain and other hourly employees with a career path to transition into Asurion's professional software engineer roles.
- **Recruiting:** The Asurion Data Science Scholarship at Fisk University, a historically Black university in Nashville, awards \$10,000 and numerous development opportunities to four to six students pursuing Computer Science or Data Science degrees each academic year. This opportunity is an effort to strengthen Asurion's diverse talent pipeline and provide Fisk students with the real-world experience needed to succeed after graduation. Asurion's recruiting footprint for early career talent includes several HBCUs and other universities and professional organizations with diverse pools of students and members.
- **Action Planning:** Asurion participates in data-driven functional action planning focused on identifying D&I gaps within a particular business function and creating comprehensive action plans to close those gaps. Plans often focus on recruiting efforts for underrepresented populations and women, education sessions, and ERG participation and engagement.

These efforts are possible because Asurion has implemented roles within the organization that are dedicated solely to the attraction and retention of a diverse workforce. This includes the creation of the Vice President, Chief Diversity and Talent Strategy Officer position in 2017 that is held by Yanika (Nikki) Smith-Bartley. Ms. Smith-Bartley, as well as April Berman, Deputy General Counsel in Asurion's Legal Department, provided further insight on Asurion's efforts to continue creating inclusive workplaces in the wake of the current social and civil unrest, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 1. What is diversity and inclusion to you? Is having diversity enough?

*April:* Diversity is the thing you can measure more objectively because you can look at numbers. Inclusion is harder to measure, but it is critical. Diversity without inclusion is a half-measure. You fail to tap into the amazing power of having teams who are engaged if you don't pay attention to inclusion and whether your employees feel heard, seen and part of the team. Our company's annual D&I report reflects a legal team with strong numbers in terms of diversity, but we would be remiss if we stopped there. So we ask whether our diverse team members sit at the important tables. I want to see our diverse team members in positions of influence, to be invested in, sponsored, and have opportunities to shine and advance throughout the organization. Employees who feel like they belong are more engaged and will do heroics to achieve the objectives of the organization. This makes a great workplace.

*Nikki:* Too often organizations focus on just the numbers. As April mentioned, it is important to create a sense of belonging, which helps create a more inclusive environment. It is equally important to examine all systems, policies and processes, formal and informal, for bias. The work is not done until organizations can truly say that everyone has an equal opportunity to be recruited, hired, developed and ultimately succeed irrespective of where they come from, what they look like or who they love.

## 2. How does Asurion keep its D&I initiatives a priority each year?

*April:* Asurion prides itself on the notion of "divine discontent," which means that we are always looking for ways to evolve and improve regardless of what success we have achieved. This commitment to continuous improvement is core to our culture. We have champions of D&I who use their voices to keep these important

issues front and center, and we report on our progress each year. There are several things we do to ensure D&I remains a top priority. First, we made D&I part of the company's strategic objectives. Setting this tone at the top and making it a priority alongside other strategic objectives underscores its importance. Second, we focus on D&I during large meetings by making it a regular part of the agenda and sharing stories that are impactful and powerful. I have found that personalizing these issues by demonstrating that our own members face these issues helps power the movement. Third, we invest money in D&I efforts, which includes funding a dedicated D&I team and providing each ERG a budget. Fourth, accountability is critical—we measure our performance through an annual D&I report and employee engagement surveys, and we use these tools to shape future efforts.

*Nikki:* We have a team of passionate leaders engaged in our D&I efforts who understand that the D&I work is hard work and that it often takes a long time to reap the fruits of your labor. For this reason, it is often the life-changing stories resulting from our D&I efforts that give me the fuel to keep pushing. One example was a 50-year-old gentleman who shared that he decided to finally "come out" as gay to his family because he was encouraged by the love and support our employees show to our Asurion LGBT community.

### **3. What are tips for other organizations that are in the development stages of creating D&I initiatives?**

*Nikki:* Start with your employees. Listen to them. Ask them about their barriers, their concerns, and where (and how) the company can improve. Use this feedback to identify goals and develop a plan to effect meaningful change. While you are developing your initiatives, don't get too caught up on what other companies are doing because while their efforts may work for them, the same efforts may not work for you. It is critical to understand your workforce, their issues and your company culture. You want to craft your initiatives so that they will succeed.

*April:* Do your research and don't be afraid to chart your own course. There is a wealth of data available to demonstrate the benefits of investing in D&I. You can also look to the roadmaps followed by other companies to inform your planning. If you need to make the business case for investment, then keep in mind that business leaders are data-driven. Support your ideas with data and information on the positive returns of having a diverse and inclusive workforce. Highlighting the value of increased employee engagement is another great angle. When you have a team that knows they can show up as themselves and feel valued for being who they are, you'll find a team that can achieve anything.

### **4. What challenges has the COVID-19 pandemic created for your D&I goals?**

*April:* The short answer is that COVID-19 hasn't impacted our D&I goals. If a company is experiencing difficulty as a result of COVID-19, my advice is to remain mindful of both your messaging about and your actions around D&I. Avoid hitting the brakes completely on D&I efforts and instead work to find creative ways to invest in D&I more than ever. The pandemic has demonstrated how important it is to be flexible and become comfortable with change. This may include flexible work schedules and other arrangements.

*Nikki:* As a result of COVID-19, we shifted to a remote workforce with almost 5,000 employees working from home in under 10 days. With so many employees working remotely, the pandemic highlighted the importance of leveraging our ERGs to create and maintain connectedness. These groups have been providing general and more tailored support to team members who are adjusting to working from home while dealing with the stresses of isolation and uncertainty and juggling other responsibilities. We are certain that our ERGs have been critical to maintaining employee engagement and wellness throughout the ongoing challenges of COVID-19. Our ERGs have continued to be virtually innovative to meet the needs of our employees. For example:

- Our HOLA ERG created bilingual story time and sing-along sessions for our employees and their children;
- Our Women's Initiative Network and Remote ERGs provided helpful tips and fun content for working from home;
- The Remote ERG created "Asurion"-themed coloring books for team members' children;
- The Pride ERG hosted multiple story times that highlighted characters who are part of the LGBTQ community;
- The Remote ERG hosted multiple Zoom tutorials and sessions on how to lead effectively in a virtual setting; and
- commUnity has started a "Let's Break Bread" series featuring local chefs who provide a virtual cooking lesson on a favorite cultural dish to various employees around the world.

## **5. How has Asurion responded to the social and civil unrest, protests and efforts of the Black Lives Matter movement?**

*April:* Absolutely top of mind for me and other leaders at Asurion. These issues permeate our conversations, and we intentionally create active dialogues about these issues and the importance of being agents for change. In our legal department, for example, we hosted a forum to learn from one another about the impact on our Black team members. We had brave team members share their personal experiences in a safe setting. This made the issues even more personal.

In fact, Asurion created a formal "Call to Action for Racial Equality" led by Black leaders and sponsored by our CEO, CFO and COO. The plan of action is the responsibility of all Asurion employees and leadership panel forums that included Nikki, our CEO, CFO and COO. Our C-suite members were asked difficult and pointed questions, and they were open and honest about what they did not know and what they were doing to become more educated. The humility and openness of saying "I am committed to doing better" and admitting faults speaks volumes. This creates an atmosphere and culture to learn, grow and be held accountable. We are also hosting forums and groups to provide emotional support to team members who are struggling as they try to cope.

In addition to forums and other programs, we are actively listening to our team members and their ideas on what we can do to be agents of change. We are educating ourselves and our team members, having open and honest conversations, cultivating empathy through storytelling, and providing financial support to initiatives and organizations that will promote social justice. We are focusing on creating diverse pipelines and recruiting new diverse talent. We are also taking a hard, critical look at how we can develop our current talent and ensure inclusion at all levels of leadership.

One of our core values is "We are one team." We are leaning into that value to learn from each other, challenge each other and support each other. We hold onto that sense of unity as we work together to improve our company and our community. As "one team" we can drive lasting change in both.

## **6. What are ways you think outside counsel can partner with clients to tackle D&I issues?**

*April:* Outside counsel should be very clear about what they are doing to advance D&I. We see those who are speaking out and those who are silent. We also see those who pitch with teams that are not diverse, who propose but do not use diverse attorneys on our files, and overall whether the firm is actively promoting and supporting underrepresented groups. Like the quality of counsel and the expertise they bring to a matter, these things factor into decision-making.

More in-house teams may look for pro-bono opportunities to address some of the legal issues stemming from social injustices, which is an opportunity for outside counsel to partner with in-house teams. We are starting to consider what these partnerships may look like, and we are open to creative suggestions from outside counsel.

**7. Let's fast forward to September 2021 and assume the economy has fully recovered and the pandemic has ended. What is one thing you hope will have changed to enhance workplace culture?**

*Nikki:* The movement for racial equality has hit home for me. Even as a diversity leader, in this moment, I talk about race and systemic oppression differently, with people with whom I've never discussed it before, in spaces where I've never discussed it before. I have also started to further educate myself on relevant history, literature and studies on this topic, so I can continue to be a champion around these efforts and continue the dialogue. I believe many Asurion employees are doing the same. So, I hope that by September 2021, as a company, we will be further along in that journey with respect to education, dialogue, and action.

*April:* I second everything Nikki says and would add that I hope more companies embrace flexibility as an enabler of employee engagement and productivity. Given that traditional work arrangements and expectations are more likely to adversely impact underrepresented groups and women, it would be a silver lining to emerge from this year with a greater appreciation for doing work differently that, in turn, results in broadened opportunities for a diverse workforce.