



Seyfarth and Shaw at 2018 Pride

The Changing Nature of Corporate Diversity

How companies in New England are leading the way with more inclusive policies and practices

Only a few years ago, equal pay for women, job opportunities for people of color, accommodations for the differently abled and antidiscrimination protections for all marginalized groups were front-and-center issues in the struggle for diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

Of course this all remains true. The struggle goes on.

However, in recent years many large corporations in New England have been hard at work developing policies and procedures to address these issues, and some of these companies in our region like Eastern Bank and Harvard Pilgrim Health Care started D&I initiatives as early as 25 years ago, simply because they recognized it was the right thing to do.

More recent progress has been facilitated by grassroots organizations like Freedom Massachusetts, the nonprofit geared toward bringing together advocates for transgender rights across a wide range of interests—from government agencies and law enforcement to faith leadership, educators, labor unions and the business community.

As a result, initiatives like the Massachusetts Freedom for Business Coalition were created. Launched in 2015, major corporations joined the coalition to endorse transgender rights and spread the word to their wide audiences of colleagues and customers. A year later, Governor Charlie Baker signed into law transgender protections, which were overwhelming defended

against the referendum to roll them back at the ballot box last November.

As progress rolls forward in communities where corporations are based in and serve, the value of businesses better reflecting the people in these communities has become clearer.

Good for business

Winson Wang, a Boston-based corporate banking associate at TD Bank and New England chair of the bank's LGBT business resource group, said his company strives to "recognize the differences among people, better understand each individual's unique characteristics, and engage those differences to create a work culture of belonging and collaboration."

This is very good business practice "because when someone is comfortable bringing their whole self to work, then it's more likely that that person will contribute to the best of their abilities. And if everyone at the bank feels that way, then

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Winson Wang

New England LGBT business resource group chair, TD Bank

the organization ultimately benefits from all those people operating at their full potential,” Wang explained.

“This allows us to have more innovative solutions, more creative problem solving, and to share different viewpoints so that we can establish better, more robust practices here at the bank,” he said.

In other words, diversity and inclusion are very good for business.

Brains and passion

Having a more diverse workforce, of course, begins at the hiring stage.

At PTC, the global software and services technology company headquartered in Boston, a new employment initiative called “Hiring for Brains and Passion” was enacted in 2018. Kathy Cullen-Cote, vice president for human resources at PTC, described the program like this: “When you hire someone because they look and sound and have credentials just like everybody else, we know that doesn’t work. We wind up with people who just want to see a nail and grab a hammer and bang it in.”

So PTC trained “100 percent” of its managers across the globe on a new approach that includes a panel of diverse members of each team for every job description, and revamped their entire recruitment practices with an eye toward developing D&I at PTC.

Similarly, TD Bank is expanding its hiring pool to include “more diverse individuals who are reflective of the diverse communities that we serve,” said Wang.

They do this through initiatives like job fairs, resume workshops and mentoring programs.

With major offices in Boston, the global law firm Seyfarth Shaw implemented a version of the NFL’s “Rooney Rule,” where teams must interview ethnic minority candidates for NFL senior-level positions, including head coach. Seyfarth’s policy, started in 2016, ensures that “at least one diverse candidate is interviewed for each associate opening,” said Kate Perrelli, a partner working from the firm’s Boston office. As a result, diverse hires among Seyfarth’s associates climbed to 44 percent in 2017. That same year, women of color and LGBT employees together made up 65 percent of Seyfarth’s associates and partners.

Employee resource groups

As corporations work toward including a more diverse workforce, they are also turning to their employees for guidance on policies and practices that foster diversity and inclusion and make the work environment more comfortable and productive.

Based in Boston for more than 200 years, the venerable financial services firm Brown Brothers Harriman has offices across six continents with a commitment to furthering its D&I policies in every corner of the globe, including less socially progressive regions around the world. According to Raymond Cyr, vice president working at the Boston headquarters, they do this largely through



Dr. Claudia Coplein, head of wellness, MassMutual

Case study: Corporate leadership answers diversity groups with action

A great example of corporate response to D&I issues in the workforce is MassMutual’s progressive new expansion of benefits, rolled out in January 2019.

“These expansions are a direct result of employee feedback,” said Dr. Claudia Coplein, head of wellness for the Springfield, Massachusetts-based corporation, which is also opening new offices at the Boston Seaport this year.

With over 450 voices nationwide in the company’s LGBT Employee Business Group (EBG), Pride, there came plenty of feedback on LGBTQ issues through this group, just one of the company’s eight EBGs that consistently share their concerns with corporate leadership.

Started 11 years ago, Pride is the company’s first EBG, but equally active are groups focusing on the interests of women, African Americans, Latinx, Asian Americans, veterans of armed forces, people with disabilities, young professionals and the allies of all of these groups. Their members make up more than 20 percent of the company’s workforce, and of course this number only reflects the percent of employees who’ve joined these groups.

their Affinity Network Community, which includes 10 groups representing a rainbow of diversity from the Pride network of LGBTQ employees, to networks for people of color, women, “diverse ability allies,” parents, young professionals and a “global employee network” promoting multicultural awareness.

“These networks were created from the shared belief that we all benefit from a workplace where colleagues are comfortable being themselves. Employees with different backgrounds and interests come together to expand their knowledge, strengthen career skills and build new relationships through volunteer activities, networking sessions, and other events that promote global knowledge sharing and community building across the firm.”

Commonly known as ERGs, or employee resource groups, each of the corporations in this story are increasingly relying on them to help develop the policies and practices that enhance their workplaces and ultimately their bottom lines.

Ryan Trapani-Goldberg, a cofounder of the LGBT resource group at PTC, started working at the company about three years

CHANGING NATURE [CONTINUES 36]



“I encourage everyone working in corporations to gather and form ERGs if they don’t already have them. It just feels great to come to work fully as you are.”

Ryan

LGBT employee resource group cofounder, PTC

Ryan Trapani-Goldberg [RIGHT] and husband Dan Trapani Goldberg at Boston Pride

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To assemble the 2019 benefits expansion, leadership listened to all employees, whether or not they were members of the groups, while making sure the interests of every EBG had a significant place at the planning table.

“We wanted to make sure our benefits are designed to be adaptable to diverse situations and be inclusive to everyone,” Coplein said.

The company already had a strong record, consistently earning a score of 100 on the Human Rights Campaign’s Corporate Equality Index, for example. But its leadership wanted to do even better.

Redefining ‘loved ones’

Take the expansion’s redefinition of “loved one,” now defined by each employee. “Who are we as a company to determine who is important to an individual? The truth is that everybody’s situation and circle of loved ones is different. This is an opportunity to empower our employees to define family and loved ones on their own terms.”

This approach applies to the expansion of their “caregiver leave” program, which understands an employee may be caring for young children but maybe also parents, or a grandparent, or a college roommate, or you name it.

This is now true too for bereavement leave, where a traditional plan might offer five days off for an immediate family member defined as a parent, child or spouse, or three days for extended family like a cousin, nephew or in-law. “We’ve done away with that completely,” Coplein says.

“We’ve not only increased the amount of paid time off, but we leave it up to the employee to define who the loved one is, and how much time they need to grieve the loss.”

As for bringing new family members into the world, benefits for family planning, fertility and parental leave are greatly expanded as well with 10 weeks of fully paid time off for mothers to recover from the birth of a child plus an additional eight weeks for parents of any gender to bond with their new offspring.

Fertility treatment and medication coverage no longer requires the “medical necessity” definition of “infertility,” Coplein said, “because quite frankly members of the LGBTQ community or people who choose to be single parents could never meet that definition. So again, who are we to decide how you should create your family?”

Transgender services are another major piece of the expansion. The company already covered the basics for those going through gender affirmation like hormone therapy testing, mental health counseling, genital surgery, and mastectomies. That coverage has now expanded to things previously not considered medically necessary or “cosmetic” in nature. “For a person going through gender affirmation, that’s not cosmetic,” Coplein said. “To maximize their success, their appearance needs to be fully transitioned.”

Other key areas of expansion are in behavioral health and cancer care. “We want to destigmatize mental health issues, and we want to make care more accessible for all,” Coplein said, who



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ago. He said they'd been an informal LGBT group that had met for lunch for about 20 years. Times had changed, and the people in it felt more comfortable "going public" by the time he'd come on the job.

As soon as they did, he said, no one looked back. His coworkers not only supported them but they asked for advice about LGBT family members and other questions that led to a more comfortable working environment. PTC's branding department even created T-shirts for the group to wear at Pride parades and other events. Together, the ERGs developed a website for all employees to follow, so everyone can learn more about each other, share interests and build relationships.

Trapani-Goldberg and his husband and PTC colleague, Dan, marched in their first Boston Pride parade with PTC last year. "It was amazing," he said. "So many LGBT employees marched together, but you know what? There were even more non-LGBT employees marching there with us. PTC is an amazing place to work. I encourage everyone working in other places to gather and form ERGs if they don't already have them. It just feels great to come to work fully as you are." [x]



MassMutual at Northampton Pride

stressed that the company is similarly committed to supporting employees and their loved ones facing cancer and has greatly expanded benefits there too.

Another new program is in paid volunteer time. MassMutual already sponsors a host of community-related events, but now employees can take time off to share their talents and skills with causes closest to their hearts. "Who are we to decide what sort of relationship one has with their community and various causes? We're

leaving that up to each individual," Coplein said.

Overall, Coplein said, "This expansion is another step in MassMutual's cultural evolution to become a more flexible and inclusive company. We feel it's important to build upon what we've said is our foundation of trust and integrity and help our employees take better care of themselves and the ones they love, and we're willing to stand behind this to be an inclusive employer of choice." —RP



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