

Delivering Diversity

An Interview with Alexander Amonett,
Global Leader of Inclusion, Diversity and Colleague Experience, Marsh

EDITORS' NOTE Alexander Amonett is a recognized D&I leader with more than 9 years of experience. He also has over 15 years of experience in global project management, learning and development, employee experience and client services. He is an influential public speaker on topics ranging from intersectionality, cross-cultural competence, unconscious bias, reverse mentoring, organizational debiasing and gender dynamics in the corporate environment.



Alexander Amonett

COMPANY BRIEF Marsh (marsh.com) is a global leader in insurance brokering and risk management. With more than 35,000 employees in over 130 countries, its experts in every facet of risk and across industries help clients to anticipate, quantify, and more fully understand the range of risks they face. Marsh offers risk management, risk consulting, insurance brokering, alternative risk financing, and insurance program management services to businesses, government entities, organizations, and individuals around the world.

How important is diversity and inclusion as part of Marsh's culture?

Marsh's culture is evolving. This industry, as a whole, has been a little slow in this regard. Across the industry, we have had a culture that is very risk adverse, and we have been stuck with some legacy blind spots. Marsh, however, is at a place now where our leaders are committed to delivering diversity.

We have employees across the globe who are taking responsibility for their role in driving inclusion and debiasing systems and processes across all lines of operations, functions and talents. We are becoming a more fluent culture in steering away from optics and driving action instead in order to create more sustainable, measurable impact. I think it is important that we remain humble and recognize that we have room to grow and that our culture has embraced a growth mindset in setting up an infrastructure of belonging.

Your role covers inclusion, diversity and colleague experience. Are these three areas interrelated?

Any type of diversity strategy has to be intentional. It has to be deliberate, it has to be

tangible, and something where you can measure progress and impact. But first and foremost, it's important to recognize that you must have an inclusive culture, and that needs to come first. It is integral to the success of any programs that we may put in place for diversity.

Regardless of how smart any company's design is to attract, retain and promote diversity, if you do not have a culture that supports diverse talent, those efforts won't be sustainable. You have to recognize then that

a one-size-fits-all approach is not going to work in a complex global matrix. I think it is important to set up a global infrastructure with goals and targets from the top and a strategy that can be positioned and prioritized at every level of the business.

We also need to recognize that we have to be flexible and allow for variation in execution as it relates to our different regions and populations. It is also essential that accountability is driven to all levels in the organization.

The colleague experience is actually living the day-to-day results that we achieve through inclusion and diversity. If we are doing inclusion and diversity right, I truly believe that colleague engagement and the colleague experience organically follows. D&I can't just be a senior leadership strategy or an HR strategy. It can't just be driven by D&I leaders or resource groups. It requires a level of commitment and engagement from every colleague in an organization. We all own this process, and that is why we embed it into our performance evaluations, our leadership competencies and our learning and development programs.

It is the way we engage our clients and it is the way we live our day-to-day work lives.

What are your views on the business case for diversity and inclusion?

I think there is probably a certain amount of fatigue around studying the business case for diversity and inclusion. We have over a decade of research, and no matter whether we are referencing the McKinsey reports or looking internally at the benefits of having diverse teams and diverse talent, we know that the more diversity you have, the stronger your bottom line revenue will be.

At Marsh, for example, our smallest resource group, which is our African heritage colleague resource group that has less than 40 members, ran events that, over a single year, raised \$8.5 million of revenue through the client opportunities and connections that came from these resource group events. That is just 40 people and we have more than 30,000 in our organization, so this shows the strength and impact that diverse colleagues can bring to the table.

How critical has it been to have such strong engagement and commitment from Marsh's C-Suite and senior leadership for its diversity and inclusion initiatives?

The commitment from the C-Suite is vital to diversity and inclusion and not just because it provides the authority to prioritize D&I as a business imperative, but also in driving accountability. It helps to position D&I not as a nice-to-have initiative or a colleague-engagement strategy, but as a mission critical to how we operate.

However, commitment can't just be lip service from our C-Suite. It can't just be a signed pledge, attending a keynote speech and reading off cue cards. It requires holding themselves accountable and measuring their hires and their promotions of diverse talent within their direct reports and teams. It requires safe-space conversations, where they can unpack their own blind spots and privilege. It requires ensuring that their opinion doesn't supersede every voice at the table, and that all voices are represented at the table. It also requires direct tie-in to their own performance, their own compensation and their own leadership competencies.

Was diversity an area that you knew you had an interest in pursuing early on?

I think there are components that led me to this position in my life. One of them was absolutely a passion, as a gay man, for moving equitable opportunities for those that I associated with in my own demographic and my own upbringing, and the injustices that I saw over a decade ago.

However, as you continue in this field, you continue to broaden and recognize that there are so many voices that need to be represented. There are so many opportunities that aren't equitable. I think most D&I leaders come into this space because they want to make change. They want to make a lasting impact on how we view the world and how we operate on a daily basis. They want everyone to shine and to have an opportunity to succeed despite privilege or experience or education. ●