

An Inclusive Culture

An Interview with Dr. Terri Cooper, Chief Inclusion Officer, Deloitte

EDITORS' NOTE *Terri Cooper has more than two decades of experience working in various capacities of the life sciences and healthcare industry, including participating in a broad range of strategic advisory services. She has created new global operating models; supported the integration of development, regulatory, and drug safety functions in a number of life sciences company mergers; restructured all aspects of the research and development value chain; and driven increased cost and efficiency measures. Cooper holds a joint honors bachelor of science degree in chemistry and pharmacology and a Ph.D. in pharmacology from the University of London, U.K.*



Terri Cooper

FIRM BRIEF *Deloitte (deloitte.com) provides industry-leading audit, consulting, tax and advisory services to many of the world's most admired brands, including 80 percent of the Fortune 500. It works across more than 20 industry sectors to deliver measurable and lasting results that help reinforce public trust in capital markets, inspire clients to make their most challenging business decisions with confidence, and help lead the way toward a stronger economy and a healthy society.*

How do you define the role of a chief inclusion officer?

It is a unique role from the perspective that it is designed to help to ensure that every professional, including all of our leaders, are confident that we are truly fostering an inclusive culture where everybody feels that they're connected and that they can be their authentic selves. In my mind, both of those are important to cultivating an environment in which people can grow.

This means that I need to carefully think about how we foster that truly inclusive environment. We know that individuals today want to work within an inclusive culture. They want to feel as though they are included, not only from a demographic perspective, but also when it comes to their sexual orientation, their ethnicity, and other personal characteristics.

To be highly successful in the business environment, we also know that we have to be inclusive from a cognitive perspective as well. We need to bring together the best ideation, the best thoughtware and the best experiences in order to deliver the best solutions for our clients, and to also challenge their thinking.

How do diversity and inclusion relate to each other?

They certainly go together. However, you can establish diversity without it necessarily meaning that you have an inclusive culture. We can create a diverse workforce by inviting everyone to the party, but if you are going to be truly inclusive, it means that everybody has to be invited to dance. This means everybody has a voice and everybody feels that they can contribute. You embrace similarities and differences, and everyone feels comfortable being their authentic self. In my mind, you need to have diversity in order to create that inclusive environment.

How does diversity impact Deloitte's hiring practices?

When we are recruiting, it's important that we focus on the best talent, but we want to make sure that it is the best diverse talent.

If we focus only on one dimension, it impairs our ability to bring in that cognitive component, which really leads to a unique perspective across the board. This means it is very, very important for us to focus on recruiting a truly diverse group of professionals.

As I mentioned before, diversity goes beyond just the standard elements of gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation. It requires that we open up our aperture and make sure that we have diversity of experience, of skillsets, of socioeconomic backgrounds and of types of education. That aperture has broadened, but it is certainly critical to take advantage of the broader view and continue to build a truly diverse talent pool.

Based on this view, we recently began to work on bringing individuals on the autism spectrum into our workforce. This is another example of our commitment to be truly diverse and inclusive.

What is the impact of diverse thought and an inclusive culture on business outcomes?

One of my Australian colleagues has published a piece called "The Diversity Inclusion Revolution: The Eight Powerful Truths." The research that she has undertaken has clearly demonstrated that a truly inclusive environment makes a company twice as likely to meet or exceed its financial targets. It's three times more likely to be high-performing. It's six times more likely to be innovative and agile, and eight times more likely to achieve better business outcomes.

Not only does diverse thinking enhance innovation by up to 20 percent, but it will actually reduce risk by approximately 30 percent. We know that having diverse perspectives at the table challenges thinking and augments business outcomes, but it's just as important to take risk out as well. The data is pretty compelling in that regard.

Is the right dialogue taking place regarding the advancement of women in business and what do you tell young women about the opportunities that exist at Deloitte?

I think the dialogue has definitely changed to include an awareness of any sort of unconscious bias. Although women may have similar skills and experiences, when it actually comes to the final decision, we want to be aware that bias doesn't play a role.

At Deloitte, we are really focused on leadership traits and what it means to be an inclusive leader. We expect all of our leaders to be committed to inclusion and to creating a collaborative environment for everyone. They need to be culturally intelligent and curious about everybody's background, while being courageous and calling out behaviors that are not appropriate.

Young women today will find the dialogue is a lot richer. The recognition of the importance of fostering an inclusive environment where everybody can thrive is really changing. This means the environment for individuals to grow has changed dramatically as well. I'm very proud of our accomplishments and how we really are continuing to increase that representation of women at the most senior levels. Women coming into Deloitte can certainly see this and we continue to build on that momentum. ●