

## Creating a Diverse Workforce

An Interview with Kathy N. Waller,  
Vice President and Controller, The Coca-Cola Company

**EDITORS' NOTE** Kathy Waller joined The Coca-Cola Company in 1987 as a senior accountant in Accounting Research. Prior to this, she worked as a senior accountant for Deloitte, Haskins & Sells Public Accounting Firm in Rochester, New York, and Atlanta, Georgia. She is a member of the Georgia Society of Certified Public Accountants and the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, as well as of the Board of Trustees of the University



Kathy N. Waller

of Rochester, the Junior League of Atlanta, the National Association of Black Accountants, and The National Black MBA Association. Waller received her bachelor's degree in history from the University of Rochester and her M.B.A. from the William E. Simon School of Business Administration at the University of Rochester.

**COMPANY BRIEF** The Coca-Cola Company ([www.thecoca-colacompany.com](http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com)) is the world's largest beverage company, refreshing consumers with more than 500 sparkling and still brands. Led by Coca-Cola, the world's most valuable brand, the company's portfolio features 15 billion-dollar brands including Diet Coke, Fanta, Sprite, Coca-Cola Zero, vitaminwater, Powerade, Minute Maid, Simply, and Georgia. Through the world's largest beverage distribution system, consumers in nearly 200 countries enjoy the company's beverages at a rate of 1.7 billion servings a day.

**The Global Women's Initiative was created at Coca-Cola in 2007. Why was the initiative created and how do you define its mission?**

The Global Women's Initiative (GWI) was developed to ensure focus on creating a workforce that mirrors – and will continue to mirror – the marketplace we are serving. Changes in demographics, economic access, and personal expectations are reshaping the global marketplace. Women are a key part of that change as they currently make the vast majority of purchase decisions – around 70 percent globally – and that number continues to grow. Our sustainable growth will depend on our ability to adapt to this rapidly

changing world. The purpose of the GWI is to accelerate the recruitment, development, advancement, and retention of qualified women across the Coca-Cola organization. An increasingly diverse consumer base calls for an increase in the number of women across our most senior levels in the organization, as well as a plan to both grow and leverage that talent.

**The following year, you developed the Women's Leadership Council (WLC). What is the focus of**

**WLC?**

The Women's Leadership Council is comprised of 17 senior level female leaders throughout the Coca-Cola global system. The role of the Council is to advise senior leadership across the organization on how best to make progress, which serves the goals of the Global Women's Initiative. Specific areas of focus include building a pipeline of women leaders; creating a supportive culture that values personal sustainability; and driving employee engagement.

**Coca-Cola is a global brand with a major presence in all markets. Are these programs for women focused globally and how do you drive them through the organization worldwide?**

Yes, these programs reach across our global organization. We recognize that some of our strategies and programs must be focused globally, such as the recruitment of women into the pipeline and the accelerated development of pipeline women. Part of the responsibility of a WLC member is to drive the initiatives not only globally, but throughout our operating geographies at a local level. This has been done through local networking events, the launching of Women's Business Resource Groups – such as the Women's Link in Coca-Cola North America – and local speaker series, which showcases successful local female leaders.

**How has the Women in Leadership program progressed in its efforts to provide key female talent at Coca-Cola an opportunity for accelerated development?**

In 2007, the year before the Global Women's Initiative began, only 21 percent

of the participants in our top development programs were women. By last year, the percentage had risen to 39 percent and year-to-date it's 49 percent. Also, by the end of 2011, 240 women will have gone through our global Women in Leadership program. Key topics of the program include learning what it means to be a leader in the Coca-Cola system, enhancing specific leadership skills and competencies such as communication and presentation skills, and exploring authentic ways of leading, influencing, and networking. Focusing on these key areas of development for female talent has served to accelerate the pipeline development of future female leaders.

**How important is it to have a strong presence of women in your workforce based on your customer profile where many of the purchasing decisions are made by women?**

Globally, women make more than 70 percent of all household shopping decisions. Over the next decade, we are going to see more than a half-billion women around the world ascend to the middle class. Changes in demographics, economic access, and personal expectations are reshaping the global marketplace.

Our sustainable growth will depend on our ability to adapt to this rapidly changing world and we strive to create a workforce as diverse in thought and people as the markets we serve.

**You joined Coca-Cola in 1987. Could you have imagined in the early days that you would spend 25 years here and what is it about the culture of the company that has made you want to stay?**

From the very beginning, the global nature of the company made a difference in my life. Although I am not sure I would have predicted in 1987 that I would be with the company for 25 years, the primary reason I stayed was evident in 1987: the company and the people of the Coca-Cola system. I continue to learn every day, which is a reason to get up every morning.

I work for a company with a wonderful brand and reputation, for leaders with integrity, and with people both in Atlanta and around the world who I enjoy being around. I am proud to work for The Coca-Cola Company. ●