



Deepa Purushothaman

EDITORS' NOTE *Aside from her role in Inclusion at Deloitte, Deepa Purushothaman is part of Deloitte's National Security Sector where she is leading the organization's efforts to build their federal footprint on the West Coast. Focused on technology, she covers the areas of cloud, cyber security, and technology advancement. Purushothaman received her M.P.P. in negotiation and conflict resolution from the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government, and her M.S.C. in economics from the London School of Economics and Political Science.*

COMPANY 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. They work across more than 20 industry sectors to deliver measurable and lasting results that help reinforce public trust in our 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.*

Would you provide an overview of Deloitte's Women's Initiative (WIN)?

Our Women's Initiative was started over 25 years ago by our CEO who didn't feel there were enough women on the senior leadership team. WIN is focused on attracting, retaining, and advancing women. As opposed to the standard women's networks that some companies have, this is one that reports to the CEO and has attention and funding. It has a grassroots aspect, but is also supported top down, which gives it visibility and real teeth as something that is important to the organization.

WIN and inclusion are parts of the DNA of Deloitte. As part of the top five traits that Deloitte is known for, even among our people, they are unique and interesting aspects of what makes Deloitte different.

Will you discuss the efforts Deloitte places on attracting diverse talent?

Of those we recruit on campus, our incoming class is 50 percent women. However, we find

A Commitment to Inclusion

An Interview with Deepa Purushothaman,
National Managing Principal of Inclusion, Deloitte

we need to place extra effort on hiring experienced women. We get our fair share of women who have left the workforce and choose to come back later in life to fill our senior roles. However, there aren't enough women in that pipeline in general, so we're doing some creative programming in that area to make a change.

How important is it to create an environment where women have more flexible working schedules?

Flexibility is one aspect of it. A few months ago, we launched a new family leave program of 16 weeks, which includes caregiving for family members. We have found that the programs we have established with our women in mind have affected our men as well. I've put an effort into moving our women focus to a gender platform, to talk about some of the issues that are now affecting both genders.

This leave policy we put in place is different because it allows 16 weeks for any type of leave; it's gender and generational neutral. It's flexible in giving people time away from work for any purpose, as roles at home are changing.

How important is it to have men as part of the conversation about progress for women?

To bring about true change in corporate America, men have to be part of the equation because they still sit in many of our senior positions.

Also, the way this is talked about is evolving. When I meet with male executives, many of whom have daughters, they want to make change in corporate America for their employees and their daughters.

Does the firm have metrics to track progress?

We place more emphasis on our inclusive culture, and we're going to announce some big changes over the summer to our inclusion program: we're calling it "reimagining inclusion." Our diversity and WIN leaders are going to change, and we're going to look at it much more from a life cycle perspective with someone focused on acquisition and on advancement within inclusion. We're doing this because times are changing.

Our millennial staff tells us they don't want to sit in a cohort; they see themselves as defined by their experiences. Many of our millennial women are not sure they want to be part of a women's network. We still think the emphasis must be there to help women advance, but we have to change how we talk about it.

How do diversity and inclusion relate?

Diversity focuses on differences and inclusion talks about how to bring everyone to the table to be part of the discussion. As we have a more diverse workforce, we want white men to be part of the dialogue and feel they also have a seat. Part of this is making people feel they can connect with others based on issues like authenticity and well-being. We're doing a lot around this discussion of the culture of courage and having people be open about who they are, because there is more than just skin color and gender that people bring to the table.

Do you find that clients are also having this discussion?

Absolutely. I was at an inclusion conference recently and there were C-level executives in the room because the topic of inclusion is of great interest to executives now. Everyone is looking for new, innovative ways to approach things like underrepresented minority hiring.

How important is cultural fit when it comes to hiring?

Our upcoming campaign tags are Connect, Belong, and Grow. "Connect" is about connecting to the values of a company and its mission and to the people that we recruit, because it's one of the top reasons that recruits come to us.

As a woman of color, "Belong" is a huge topic for me. It's about wanting to feel I am at a company where I can resonate with the leaders and the values. That sense of belonging helps people stay.

"Grow" is about people wanting to be in jobs where they can pursue their sense of purpose and feel the company is investing in them.

Is it frustrating to see how slow change happens?

Organizations are trying to put things in place, but it takes being creative and doing things differently. There is an appetite for a new conversation.

We also need to highlight the areas where things are changing and place emphasis there, because people need to see those examples to know what is possible.

Is there a mentoring component as well?

I prefer sponsorship over mentorship, because it involves people that may have some influence and will be truly invested in a person's career advancement. Furthermore, women need to sponsor women. Some women do and some don't. I think as women, we have an opportunity to help raise up those that come after us, and I want to see more women doing that. ●