

Create, Articulate, Regulate and Evaluate

An Interview with Lori George Billingsley,
Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, The Coca-Cola Company

EDITORS' NOTE *Lori George Billingsley has 17-years of leadership experience with Coca-Cola. In her current role, she leads the company's Global Diversity and Inclusion Center of Excellence, along with the Diversity, Inclusion and Workplace Fairness teams for North America. Prior to assuming this role in October 2018, Billingsley served as Vice President of Community and Stakeholder Relations for Coca-Cola North America, where she led community giving and engagement, stakeholder relations, employee volunteerism, community board placements, disaster relief and the company's 5by20 initiative in North America. Billingsley is also an ordained minister and serves as an executive advisor to the company's Multicultural Leadership Council, Global Women's Leadership Council and Millennial Voices Leadership Council. She also sits on several boards, including the board of directors of The Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Inc., Women's Business Enterprise National Council, ColorComm, NAACP Foundation and Arete-Executive Women of Influence.*



Lori George Billingsley

COMPANY BRIEF *The Coca-Cola Company (coca-colacompany.com) is a total beverage company, offering over 500 brands in more than 200 countries and territories. In addition to the company's Coca-Cola brands, its portfolio includes some of the world's most valuable beverage brands, such as AdeS soy-based beverages, Ayataka green tea, DASANI waters, Del Valle juices and nectars, Fanta, Georgia coffee, Gold Peak teas and coffees, Honest Tea, Innocent smoothies and juices, Minute Maid juices, POWERADE sports drinks, Simply juices, smartwater, Sprite, vitaminwater and ZICO coconut water. The Coca-Cola Company is constantly transforming its portfolio, from reducing sugar in its drinks to bringing innovative new products to market. The company also works to reduce its environmental impact by replenishing water and promoting recycling. With its bottling partners, The Coca-Cola Company employs more than 700,000 people, helping bring economic opportunity to local communities worldwide.*

Coca-Cola was recently ranked among the 50 best companies for diversity and in the top 10 largest U.S. companies in terms of commitment to gender equality. What excited you about assuming your current role?

I've been involved in diversity and inclusion in every role I've had at Coca-Cola, so this position is a culmination of all of those experiences. We've all been on a diversity journey for many years and, recently, have embraced the importance of inclusion. It's an exciting time to make an impact in both of those areas, in the U.S. and globally.

You were named Chief Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Officer in late 2018. What have you learned so far and what opportunities do you see?

For my first 90 days, I was on a listen-and-learn tour. I talked to employees across all levels of the company, as well as Human Resources (HR) and senior leadership. I also met with D&I officers at other companies and had the opportunity to present to our Board of Directors' Public Issues and Diversity Review Committee.

I walked away with some important learnings. Company leadership was concerned about the progression of our pipeline and difficulty of sourcing diverse senior-level talent. Many associates were not aware of all of our D&I programs, and some thought our work was only U.S.-focused. Others were unclear about their path to promotion at the company. I discovered a need for our office to strategically integrate better with HR, versus operating as a standalone department, to focus our shared efforts on addressing areas of opportunity and building for the future.

Will you share your key priorities?

I developed a destination statement based on everything I learned during my first 90 days. We hear a lot about how community giving is in our company's DNA. From my point of view, diversity and inclusion should be, too. In support of this destination statement, I landed on four strategic imperatives under the CARE acronym: (Create, Articulate, Regulate and Evaluate). *Create* is about building an inclusive environment by engaging diverse talent and influencing recruitment, development, advancement and retention. We will *Articulate* our progress through proactive communications. *Regulate* means managing our workplace in compliance with the law. *Evaluate* refers to providing a systematic set of tools like a D&I assessment we plan to initiate with our business units to identify best practices and opportunities for improvement.

How do you define diversity and inclusion at Coca-Cola?

Diversity is about things you can see. Inclusion is about feeling, once you've been invited in, that you're accepted as part of what you've been invited into. Inclusion is when your voice is heard and valued and that you feel like part of the team. Dr. Steve Robbins, a renowned speaker on diversity and inclusion topics, is helping our company with "unconscious bias" education with a focus on the insider versus outsider mentality. We want to make sure everyone feels like an insider and feels included.

What is unconscious bias and how can it affect personnel decisions?

Unconscious bias is being unaware of your biases – and we all have them. When it comes to how it affects a company's personnel decisions, it is most evident in hiring decisions. For example, let's say you have a resume from a job applicant and you see that they graduated from your alma mater. You may think to yourself, unconsciously, "They'll be great!" The same could apply to someone from your hometown, who lives in your neighborhood, who attends your church or maybe has kids in school with your kids. You have an unconscious preference because of your familiarity. We try to counteract this through "conscious inclusion." This involves being aware of your unconscious biases and making a deliberate attempt to be inclusive.

Coca-Cola has earned a reputation as one of the world's most inclusive brands. Does this provide an even greater responsibility to be a supporter of diversity and inclusion both inside the company and in the community?

Yes, we absolutely have a greater responsibility. We must be a champion for our business, our people and our communities. Our partners and suppliers also look to us to be a vocal and active leader in the diversity and inclusion space.

What excites you most about this role?

In my previous role, I focused on funding organizations that do great things in the community. My current role focuses more on our culture and the experiences our associates share inside the four walls of the company. I am fortunate that I get to directly see the impact on the organization. Also, the fact that this is a global role is tremendously exciting. Our company has identified a set of growth behaviors to serve as a foundation of the culture we hope to build. "Inclusive" is one of these. Inclusion is a key priority for our business and everyone is expected to operate with an inclusive mindset. ●