

Inclusive Leadership

An Interview with Sonia Cargan,
Chief Diversity Officer, American Express

EDITORS' NOTE *Sonia Cargan was appointed to her current role in March 2018. In this role, she leads a seven member team of D&I experts. She also serves as a liaison to the company's 16 Colleague Networks that have more than 100 global chapters including the Black Engagement Network, the Hispanic Origin & Latin American Network and the Jewish Network. Prior to this position, Cargan spent 22 years serving in various roles at American Express including Vice President of HR in the U.K. and in Singapore and, most recently, as Vice President, HR business partner, for global finance and corporate functions in New York City.*



Sonia Cargan

women's spending power when developing and marketing new products. American Express aims to ensure a diversity of perspectives at every level and in all areas of the company, especially in decision-making and problem-solving scenarios. This generates the best ideas that drive innovation and, ultimately, business growth.

Will you highlight the company's efforts to create a diverse and inclusive environment?

American Express has a long history of being focused on inclusion and diversity. Over the years we have continually evolved and expanded programs to support our colleagues and business imperatives. Our core inclusion and diversity strategy is about valuing and embracing difference and creating an environment where all colleagues are engaged, have a voice, and can achieve success. We are focused on enabling a culture of inclusion and diversity at American Express, driving the integration of our inclusion and diversity architecture into key talent and business strategies and elevating the brand narrative and our presence both internally and externally. Our goal is to set the gold standard for inclusion and diversity. Ultimately, our diversity efforts focus on improving the representation of underrepresented minorities and women, while helping all colleagues achieve great things.

How does American Express engage its colleagues in its diversity efforts?

Colleague engagement is essential to the success of our diversity initiatives. We have worked diligently over the past 30 years to build a culture where all colleagues feel included and engaged. We track inclusion efforts in our colleague survey, which indicates that our employee inclusion level is quite high. However, we always strive for improvement and have recently launched a new training program focused on inclusive leadership. The inclusive leadership experience equips leaders with strategies and skills for leading inclusive teams and is designed to motivate colleagues to engage in specific behaviors to foster an inclusive environment. We also offer a host of other substantive leadership programs, partnering with several organizations to provide external development experiences for high-potential women and multicultural colleagues. Our Colleague Networks also go a long way in increasing engagement. Since 1987, Colleague Networks have brought together people with

shared backgrounds and interests to interact with and learn from each other. In the U.S., a large majority of our colleagues reported that they were a member of at least one Colleague Network in our 2017 Colleague Pulse survey. The same survey also indicated that colleagues who participate in networks are more engaged at the company. With 16 networks and more than 100 chapters globally, our Colleague Networks encompass the full spectrum of diversity, including disability, ethnicity, faith, gender, gender identity, generations, sexual orientation and veteran status.

How important is American Express' commitment to diversity and inclusion in attracting the next generation of leaders?

Our stakeholders are increasingly diverse, and Millennials and Generation Z are extremely savvy in recognizing that and aligning themselves with a company that mirrors those stakeholders. Our commitment to inclusion and diversity helps us bring in some of the best and brightest among the emerging workforce. Our Global Talent, Leadership and Learning team recruits on college campuses, leverages colleagues' personal networks, and participates in events that attract diverse populations. We also partner with professional associations to ensure that we're tapping into top talent. Additionally, we recently created a new Vice President of Diversity Executive Engagement role. This vice president focuses on expanding the recruitment of women globally at the vice president and above levels, as well as underrepresented minorities in the U.S., helping build a robust pipeline of diverse prospective candidates.

What has made your time at American Express so special?

I joined American Express more than 22 years ago and prior to my current position, I was a senior HR business partner for a portfolio of groups including Global Finance, the General Counsel's Organization, Global Advertising and Brand Management, the Internal Audit Group and Corporate Affairs & Communications – truly a diverse set of roles. I stayed with the company for the past two decades because I believe strongly that I have a voice with American Express. I'm a woman of color, a working mom, and have spent time living and working on three different continents. I've harnessed my diversity to impact the business and want all American Express colleagues to know they can do the same. ●

COMPANY BRIEF *American Express (americanexpress.com), together with its subsidiaries, provides charge and credit payment card products, as well as travel-related services, to consumers and businesses worldwide. It operates through three segments: Global Consumer Services, Global Commercial Services, and Global Merchant and Network Services. The company's products and services include charge and credit card products, as well as other payment and financing products; network services; expense management products and services; travel-related services; and prepaid products. Its products and services also comprise merchant acquisition and processing, servicing and settlement, point-of-sale marketing, and information products and services for merchants, as well as fraud prevention services along with the design and operation of customer loyalty programs. American Express was founded in 1850 and is headquartered in New York City.*

How do you define the role of Chief Diversity Officer for American Express?

As Chief Diversity Officer, I am responsible for overseeing American Express' global inclusion and diversity strategy. This includes leading a team of inclusion and diversity specialists, overseeing our company's 16 active Colleague Networks with more than 100 global chapters, and implementing initiatives that help advance minority colleagues. As an instrumental part of my role, I consider our stakeholder needs, as well as our business objectives, and determine how inclusion and diversity will help colleagues deliver those objectives, such as understanding