

Achieving Brighter Financial Futures

An Interview with Jonita Wilson, Vice President, Chief Diversity Officer, Discover Financial Services

EDITORS' NOTE *Serving as Chief Diversity Officer, Jonita Wilson is responsible for leading Discover's diversity, equity and inclusion strategies. With more than 20 years' experience as a strategic human resources leader and trusted advisor to colleagues at all levels, she has a strong history of driving business results. She also volunteers as an elected high school board member and serves on the school's diversity and equity committee to help drive change and create a fair learning environment. Having worked in a variety of corporate cultures, she has developed a passion for impacting ways of working so everyone feels like they have equal opportunity to advance and be successful. Wilson earned a B.A. degree in applied behavioral science from National Louis University and her Human Resources certification from the HR Certification Institute.*



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Network, with millions of merchant and cash access locations; PULSE, one of the nation's leading ATM/debit networks; and Diners Club International, a global payments network with acceptance around the world.

How do you define the Discover culture and how critical is culture to the success of the company?

At Discover, we recognize that a strong company culture is critical to attract and retain top talent. We are really focused on a culture where

everyone feels like their unique perspective matters, they feel valued, can be themselves and are provided equitable access to opportunities to grow and advance their careers. We want people to come to Discover and stay because they are inspired to grow, get to do meaningful work from day one, and feel at home here. Overall, we want diversity, equity and inclusion in all that we do because we believe that will be what sustains and enhances our great culture. Since our employees are our greatest asset, a competitive advantage – the more they feel free to be their best selves at work and do their best work, the better the service we can provide to our customers, which helps everyone achieve brighter financial futures.

Will you discuss Discover's diversity and inclusion efforts?

This year's challenges have really highlighted the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion. At Discover, we understand that DE&I is a

business imperative and is an enabler to our success. All of our employees have a part in helping us to achieve our strategic goals, and it has been great seeing the way everyone is stepping up and making conscious efforts as change agents in full support and advocacy to move the needle.

Discover's efforts are intentionally focused on increasing diverse representation among our leadership ranks, enhancing our systems to be more equitable, strengthening our inclusive culture by providing resources and support that enable our employees to show up as themselves and do their best work, and intentionally creating a strong and lasting impact in our surrounding communities.

The key actions tackle work both big and small, from updating language in our Code of Conduct to help limit bias in all we do, to tackling our supplier network, actively putting programs in place to dramatically increase spending with minority and women-owned businesses and build a more diverse and inclusive supplier network. Additionally, we have implemented a data-centric approach to increasing representation, providing enhanced reporting to director-level and above by providing key attributes that will help improve hiring, retention, equity and inclusion. We're also partnering with organizations like DisabilityIN working to develop and strengthen strategies, policies, and procedures that advance disability inclusion. Our CEO, Roger Hochschild, is among 10 CEOs to sign a letter to Fortune 1,000 companies from DisabilityIN urging them to advance disability inclusion as well.

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How important is it for Discover to build a diverse and inclusive workforce in order to bring different perspectives and experiences to the table when making business decisions?

Diverse perspectives and experiences make us stronger, better able to serve our customers and are a key enabler to business success. First, by having a diverse employee population we are better able to speak to the needs and better serve our diverse customers. Second, diversity of perspective can also mean different and sometimes conflicting perspectives come to the table. When we have a psychologically safe, inclusive environment that enables our teams to work through conflict in a respectful and meaningful way, the solutions themselves are actually more inclusive and more creative. This ultimately helps us deliver on our mission to help our employees, customers and communities achieve brighter financial futures.

Will you highlight the engagement and commitment of Discover’s management team and board for the company’s diversity and inclusion programs?

We believe that the most powerful thing a company can do to promote DE&I is to lead from the top. An important aspect of leading is listening. Our leaders have been engaged in what we call “candid conversations” over the past few months, creating the environment where people can feel safe to speak open and honestly. From a strategic perspective, Discover’s Executive Committee has worked collectively to develop our company-wide North Star goals and this is the first time we created

an intentional strategy that connects our culture, colleagues and communities. It is about taking the time to make sure we have the right long-term enterprise-wide strategy for Discover. We regularly keep our Board of Directors informed of our DE&I strategies and key actions, and we are happy to have their full support.

Further, Discover has a DE&I Steering Committee where our CEO and President, Roger Hochschild, our Chief Legal Officer and General Counsel, Wanji Walcott, and our Chief Human Resources & Administrative Officer, Andy Eichfeld, serve as Executive Sponsors. They are joined by several officers representing nearly all of our business units. Together, these leaders help to advance our DE&I initiatives.

How critical are metrics in order to measure the impact of Discover’s diversity and inclusion initiatives?

Metrics are table stakes for us at Discover. Without the rigor of reporting and a data-centric mindset, we would be unable to truly know whether or not our strategy and efforts are having the intended effect towards meeting our goals for a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment, both internally and externally.

Do you feel that there are strong opportunities for women to grow and lead in the industry?

Yes, absolutely I believe there are strong opportunities for women to grow and lead in the industry. It is important for companies to get connected with this talent early (high school/early college), to start the attraction and work to cultivate women to lead in this industry. It’s

about developing and growing the pipeline. Overall at Discover, we have strong representation of women, but are intentionally focused on increasing women representation amongst our leadership ranks. Additionally, we have programs in place that specifically focus on developing the women in our workforce.

On an enterprise level, Discover has committed to the Equity Pledge announced by The Chicago Network’s Campaign for Advancing Women Leaders in the Workplace. The pledge is a public commitment to work toward achieving 50 percent representation of women in leadership positions by 2030. The commitment includes abiding by the Equity Principles, a cornerstone of the campaign, to remove barriers, define success, evolve culture, enhance community, and maintain accountability.

What advice do you offer young people beginning their careers during this challenging and uncertain time?

Treat your career and your development the same way you would one of your business goals. Actually spend some time to set your goals and then develop a plan to lead you there. Be a lifelong learner with a growth mindset and learn as much as you can along the way, leverage your existing network and be mindful and intentional about expanding it so the people in it can help inform your path and help you towards your goals, be agile and then ready you unafraid to pivot and change direction quickly if needed. Always keep your eyes focused on that end result you are seeking. Lastly, and most importantly, pay it forward and have fun. ●

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