

Inclusion, Equity, Advocacy and Community

An Interview with Michael Lopez, Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer, Hewlett Packard Enterprise

EDITORS' NOTE *Michael Lopez is responsible for driving the strategies that foster an inclusive experience for HPE employees and diversify its workforce to position the company for success today and tomorrow. Prior to joining HPE, he was the Head of Inclusion and Diversity for Diageo North America, where he served as HR Director for multiple Supply Chain facilities. He previously was the Head of Global Inclusion and Diversity at Alcoa and Arconic. Before returning to Human Resources and focusing on the Inclusion and Diversity field of practice, he was the Chief of Staff to the Chief Executive Officer at Arconic. Earlier in his career, Lopez held multiple positions across corporate, public, government and international affairs at Alcoa, and human resources at Jefferies & Company and Goldman Sachs. He is an active member of the Human Rights Campaign and serves on the organization's Business Advisory Council. In 2020, Lopez was named one of the top 50 Chief Diversity Officers by the National Diversity Council and Diversity Stars. In 2016, he was named Upstanding's top 100 Leading Ethnic Minority Executives in the United States and the United Kingdom. He is also a former member of the Board of Directors at the Hetrick-Martin Institute, which is dedicated to providing critical services to at-risk LGBTQ youth. Lopez graduated magna cum laude from New York University with a BA degree in organization behavior and earned a master's degree in international affairs from The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts.*



Michael Lopez

How do you define the role of Chief Diversity Officer and how important is it for the role to be engaged in business strategy?

Increasingly we are being pulled into conversations across the organization, which is positive news. Hence, we must drive organizational capability around diversity, equity and inclusion. To do that, I believe every Chief Diversity Officer and their teams need to design, influence and drive the execution of behavioral and structural changes. I approach this work through

a change management lens.

Amid social unrest, increasing demands and political polarization, the role has become more complex and dynamic. The recent work from Korn Ferry resonates with me on this topic. I, too, believe the next-gen Chief Diversity Officers need to move:

- from a focus on race and gender to a mosaic of differences;
- from values-based to business-based;
- from a U.S. focus to a global focus;
- from event-driven tactics to a cohesive strategy; and,
- from recruitment focused to engagement focused.

The business strategy needs to sit at the core of the work; otherwise, the work becomes a nice add-on, but not mission-critical. We must connect the work consistently to how it enables business outcomes by expanding its reach to increasingly diverse talent, new products, diverse markets, and innovation.

Will you provide an overview of HPE's diversity and inclusion strategy?

As we worked through our reckoning of the tragic killing of George Floyd as an organization through listening sessions from various internal communities, impact themes emerged which informed our updated strategy pillars: Inclusion, Equity, Advocacy and Community, enabled at the core by our commitment to creating lasting change.

- Inclusion: Our people programs and practices and our culture make all team members feel like they belong at HPE;
- Equity: The best people from all different backgrounds are hired, retained, compensated, and promoted equitably;
- Advocacy: We show up as sponsors and speak up for each other proactively in support of our team members;
- Community: We partner with our stakeholders internally and externally to advance inclusion and social justice.

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COMPANY BRIEF *Hewlett Packard Enterprise (hpe.com) is the global edge-to-cloud platform as-a-service company that helps organizations accelerate outcomes by unlocking value from all of their data, everywhere. Built on decades of reimagining the future and innovating to advance the way people live and work, HPE delivers unique, open and intelligent technology solutions with a consistent experience across all clouds and edges to help customers develop new business models, engage in new ways, and increase operational performance.*

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The engine of our strategy is sustaining the effort and building multi-year plans that we collectively as an organization develop with our pan-HPE Inclusion and Diversity Executive Council, chaired by our CEO and co-chaired by me.

How engrained is diversity and inclusion in HPE’s culture and values?

We are on a continuous journey to further realize our ambitions. As part of our cultural blueprint, one of our core beliefs is our belief in unconditional inclusion, reinforced through our enterprise recognition portal, so we celebrate inclusion every day whenever we recognize it in our teams. Each year we award leadership who emulates our beliefs at HPE’s Leadership Forum, presented by our CEO with the company’s top 400 leaders. We measure inclusion through our employee engagement survey, and inclusion is one of the core competencies in the Elements of Leadership which guide how people leaders show up in their teams and the organization.

How do you engage your employees in HPE’s diversity efforts?

Across the organization in regions around the world, each function and geography have inclusion and diversity plans to ensure they are locally relevant to the needs of their groups. The opportunities are endless, and I am encouraged by the organizations’ broad-based recognition and commitment to advance talent equitably. While there is much more to do to embed equity systemically, we can do much to drive our paths forward. At HPE, we believe in embracing Courage over Comfort and Pushing for Better. These two factors are significant contributors to anyone’s growth and ability to lead. If you aren’t a bit uncomfortable, are you pushing yourself hard enough? Pan-HPE, we host global activities every month to celebrate the rich diversity of our team members in partnership with our Employee Resource Groups. Our Inclusion Enablement team has developed learning opportunities for all team members to deepen our collective knowledge and provide resources to take action. Additionally, we host campaigns like our Summer Advocate series, which provide opportunities to engage in courageous conversations about relevant topics of interest to build greater understanding across differences. Based on our learnings last year, we have also embedded regular virtual

listening sessions with communities and our executives to keep the lines of communication open and hold ourselves collectively accountable as an organization to take action.

While diversity and inclusion is the right thing to do, you have also said that it is a business imperative. What do you see as the impact of diversity and inclusion on driving better business outcomes?

Diverse perspectives empowered to bring their authentic selves to advance the business strategy will improve our outcomes. To enable team members to show up as their authentic selves, we need to foster psychologically safe teams. As Amy Edmondson has demonstrated in her research, these teams have proven they outperform. Add on employees’ expectations that their organizations are committed to diversity and inclusion, plus customer and shareholder expectations increasing in this area, and the net of this is clear – companies who do not sustain their advances toward this objective are at a competitive disadvantage.

Is it critical to have metrics in place to track the impact of HPE’s diversity and inclusion efforts?

Absolutely. We regularly monitor a mix of qualitative and quantitative metrics to evaluate progress. As mentioned earlier, the role is dynamic, so ensuring there are mechanisms to take the organization’s pulse is critical to adjust strategies. While each organization needs to decide how to drive accountability, I believe leadership must be accountable for making progress, and being transparent internally and externally drives lasting change. We hold our senior leaders responsible for team member success, measured using multiple factors including career growth, rewards and recognition, inclusion and diversity, and pride. These factors are integrated into management goals and tied to executive compensation.

How valuable has it been to have the commitment of HPE’s board and senior management in its diversity and inclusion efforts?

The partnership with the board is instrumental in driving alignment, and I meet with them regularly to review our strategy, progress and get their input on ways to further our efforts. Pamela Carter, an HPE Director, is a member of the HPE Inclusion and Diversity Executive Council which meets quarterly to

review progress on the four pillars of our strategy and to consider emerging perspectives and insights that will impact our work. In 2020, we conducted a psychological safety survey to understand better opportunities to promote an environment where every employee can succeed. Initial findings indicate that mentorship and sponsorship and increased transparency around inclusion efforts significantly influence psychological safety. We have set a goal for all senior leaders to be a sponsor of diverse talent. The engagement of senior management as part of our ongoing listening sessions, their sponsorship of the Employee Resource Groups, participation in I&D Councils, and championing diversity and inclusion efforts have been instrumental in conveying our collective commitment.

What do you tell young, diverse talent about the opportunities that exist to grow and lead in the industry?

The digitization of content has made growth opportunities more accessible, and I encourage all talent to pursue them vigorously. There is virtually no topic that isn’t digitally available now to explore. I encourage every person to bring their diverse perspectives to whatever industry they are passionate about pursuing. While there is much more to do to embed equity systemically, we can do much to drive our paths forward.

Over the years, mentors and sponsors have helped me formulate a few recommendations I am happy to pass along:

- You are in the driver’s seat for your growth;
- Build a network of friends, allies, mentors, sponsors, and connectors;
- Be accountable and proactively seek out feedback;
- Invest in yourself by spending ample time working on where you want to go.

Finally, if you are in an organization and don’t feel heard or cannot be your authentic self, get out. On balance, all of us will spend the most amount of our time engaged in our careers, so being in an organization that you believe you can bring your diverse contributions isn’t a nice thing to have – it’s essential. In the words of a friend and colleague, “empowerment is claimed, not given.” Empower yourself, and nothing is unachievable without grit, a growth mindset, and a willingness to make mistakes and learn. ●