

## Fostering A Sense Of Belonging

An Interview with Karyn Twaronite, EY Global Vice Chair – Diversity, Equity & Inclusiveness

**EDITORS' NOTE** Karyn Twaronite is EY Global Vice Chair – Diversity, Equity & Inclusiveness. She is a member of the EY Global Practice Group leadership team and the EY Global Talent Committee. In her role, she is responsible for driving innovations that maximize the strength and effectiveness of the firm's diverse workforce of almost 400,000 people across 150 countries in the Americas, Asia-Pacific and Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EMEA). Twaronite received a bachelor's degree in accounting from Miami University of Ohio and a master's degree in taxation from Fordham University. She holds a certificate in Strategic Human Resource Management from Harvard Business School and is a graduate of the Partnership for New York City's David Rockefeller Fellows program. Twaronite is a licensed CPA of New York.



Karyn Twaronite

side, I trusted their advice and took a chance which opened doors I hadn't anticipated.

One of my most pivotal roles came when I was invited to build and lead our firm's Diversity, Equity & Inclusiveness (DE&I) platform on a global scale. This role allowed me to integrate my skills in business with my competitive drive for fostering an inclusive workplace. I've seen firsthand how diversity extends beyond identity, encompassing unique perspectives, backgrounds, and skills.

My journey reflects the power of taking risks and embracing change – a mindset that's been essential in adapting to the evolving needs of our organization and diverse talent across 150 countries and over 400,000 people.

**How can organizations better support the career development of women and individuals from underrepresented backgrounds at entry- and mid-level positions?**

Inclusiveness is essential to attract and retain top talent for today and tomorrow. Organizations

can create inclusive environments that provide resources, tools, and advocacy opportunities to fuel career development. Barriers still exist, particularly for those who have been marginalized due to their gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background, and other factors. At EY, we're committed to removing obstacles in creating an inclusive culture where everyone feels a sense of belonging. We implement equitable processes that challenge traditional assumptions, broadening our talent pool to attract candidates from diverse backgrounds.

Newer tools like the EY Candidate Assistant and EY Opportunity Marketplace leverage AI to match employees with roles and opportunities that align with their skills and ambitions, often uncovering career paths they might not have considered within the organization. Our recruitment and development processes integrate inclusion at every step. For example, our EY Job Analyzer ensures job descriptions are free from gender bias, fostering fairer hiring practices.

Sponsorship and mentorship are transformative and critical career accelerators for all, especially for women and underrepresented

**FIRM BRIEF** EY (ey.com) is building a better working world by creating new value for clients, people, society, and the planet, while building trust in capital markets. Enabled by data, AI and advanced technology, EY teams help clients shape the future with confidence and develop answers for the most pressing issues of today and tomorrow. EY teams work across a full spectrum of services in assurance, consulting, tax, strategy, and transactions. Fueled by sector insights, a globally connected, multidisciplinary network and diverse ecosystem partners, EY teams can provide services in more than 150 countries and territories.

**WILL YOU provide an overview of your role and areas of focus, and discuss your career journey?**

I've been fortunate enough to have had a rewarding career journey at EY spanning 25+ years, where I've taken on multiple roles and embraced new challenges. I began as a CPA in tax, but my path has been anything but linear. Early on, I had sponsors who appreciated my work ethic and advocated for me. Their support empowered me to pivot into different areas across our business, including a major shift from tax to talent, culture and inclusiveness spaces. While I was initially hesitant about this new direction given my early credentials were on the technical accounting



Karyn Twaronite with EY colleagues and guests at a DE&I Allyship event

**“EY’s approach to DE&I is deeply integrated across our business with inclusiveness as one of our EY core values. Our goal is to ensure that every employee feels valued and included with the opportunity to thrive.”**

groups. While mentors provide guidance, sponsors advocate on behalf of individuals, championing their accomplishments and promoting them for high-visibility assignments. This support can transform career trajectories and drive equitable advancement. I often say that it is not just who talks to you, but who talks about you when you are not in the room, advocating for your opportunities and visibility advancement. Together, these initiatives create a more inclusive environment where all individuals can thrive and reach their full potential, benefiting both personal growth and organizational success.

**Will you highlight EY’s integrated approach to diversity, equity, and inclusiveness?**

EY’s approach to DE&I is deeply integrated across our business with inclusiveness as one of our EY core values. Our goal is to ensure that every employee feels valued and included with the opportunity to thrive. EY’s recent Belonging Barometer study of employees across companies globally found that people prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusiveness in choosing the company they work for, regardless of generation. I’ve found that sometimes the smallest actions can have the greatest impact when it comes to embedding DE&I into the fabric of an organization. Our study revealed that Gen Z and Millennials, in particular, feel a stronger sense of belonging when colleagues take the time to check in with them one-on-one. This reminds us that regular, authentic connections can make a big difference in reducing feelings of exclusion across generations. Research shows that consistent check-ins can lead to better engagement, stronger teams, and even greater career advancement.

We also try to recognize people across many dimensions so that they can be seen and heard. One example of how we’re personalizing support is our expanded global Self-ID capabilities across over 100 countries, allowing us to better understand and meet our teams’ unique needs.

Given this is a business priority for us – and one we take seriously – we recognize that building an inclusive culture requires accountability. We review an annual Global DE&I Progress Report with our CEO and management teams. This is a key management tool that helps drive consistent DE&I actions and propels our organization’s progress and identifies areas for improvement. We have been tracking our progress for more than five years

now, and while we have more work to do, we continue to see collective progress across the entire organization.

**How important is it in your role to have commitment and engagement from EY’s executive team in the firm’s DE&I efforts?**

Inclusiveness progress is a team sport. No one person can influence the culture and progress of an entire organization. EY’s executive team is crucial to our DE&I efforts, as it truly sets the tone at the top. This starts with our CEO and firm’s DE&I statement personally signed by all members of our Global Executive, EY’s highest governing body, reaffirming their dedication as individuals to fostering a more inclusive workplace. To showcase this, they have collectively pledged to lead inclusively and hold themselves accountable for advancing diversity, equity, and inclusiveness.

Also essential to driving progress is our Global DE&I Steering Committee (GDEISC), which I co-chair alongside our CEO and senior leaders from around the world. This “think-and-action tank” of influential thoughtful leaders sets the pace with me and drives the success of our strategy across all diversity dimensions. Together, we ensure that our commitment to inclusion cascades across every level of the organization.

Having leadership that is actively involved and engaged not only reinforces DE&I

as a business priority, but also empowers our entire workforce to contribute to a culture where all experiences are valued. This executive-level commitment is foundational to sustaining meaningful progress and ensuring DE&I is woven into the fabric of EY’s culture. We have seen how inclusiveness significantly enhances our ability to attract top talent and deliver a best-in-class client service model.

**How do diverse, equitable and inclusive workplaces foster a culture of belonging and innovation to drive organizational success?**

Research shows that when employees feel they truly belong, they’re significantly more likely to contribute to their fullest potential. At EY, we are committed to creating environments where employees feel safe to share their unique experiences and bring their authentic selves to work. It’s important to regularly ask employees how they feel to assess whether we’re impacting their sense of belonging. This ensures our strategies are informed and backed by meaningful data. We conduct periodic studies each year of all of our people and employee-led surveys that explore attitudes toward the global workplace, working practices, and DE&I. For example, our Global People Pulse Survey, conducted three times a year, reveals that while we’re not perfect, we’re making progress in delivering



*Karyn Twaronite hosting a virtual meeting with Global CEO Janet Truncale and members of the Global DE&I Steering Committee*

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better, more inclusive experiences. Currently, 83 percent of our people say they “feel free to be myself” and 86 percent express pride in working at EY.

Further, our research identifies key strategies for leaders and organizations to foster a greater sense of belonging, particularly in a post-COVID environment. The findings revealed that even in today’s digitally connected world, three-quarters of employees across companies still feel excluded at work. Internally, we’re combating this through our Inclusive Leadership for All and Upstanding Interventions training programs that empower employees to act inclusively and address potential inequities, building awareness, and cultivating more inclusive behaviors. We also work to support flexibility and work-life integration, recognizing that these factors are critical to fostering a sense of belonging. Flexibility isn’t limited to certain groups; it’s available to all employees – and leaders play a key role by supporting work models that enable team members to work where, when, and how they are most productive. Finally, we know that diverse teams are vital for innovation, especially in today’s digital age, where representation in design and implementation helps remove barriers and ensure equitable outcomes. From fostering authentic connections to embracing flexibility and investing in diverse talent, inclusive workplaces set the foundation for individual and organizational success.

**We know from Janet Truncale (EY Global Chair and CEO) that social mobility and socio-economic inclusion is a big focus for EY. Will you tell us more about why and how EY is addressing this?**

Socio-economic background is an often-overlooked part of one’s identity that brings unique perspectives to the workplace. The Belonging Barometer found that 56 percent of workers hesitate to share their full identities at work, with socio-economic background being one of the least shared aspects alongside religion and politics. Addressing this gap is essential for unlocking potential across our workforce, as socio-economic diversity strengthens our ability to innovate and approach challenges creatively. As I like to say, great talent exists everywhere. Embracing socio-economic inclusion allows

us to continue to broaden and attract top talent across the world.

With global disparities in access to opportunities, EY has a strong focus on social equity and social mobility that aims to help build awareness, spark meaningful conversations and drive action. One of our strategies has been to amplify employee storytelling through films, showcasing diverse perspectives and experiences to broaden awareness, foster understanding, and strengthen connections. The EY Uplift Social Equity campaign and subsequent social mobility campaign have become a basis for deeper conversations with clients, community partners, and a topic at high-profile events globally. My favorite part of sharing these stories of social mobility has been seeing our people in their own words say, “that’s me!” and “that’s my story too!”

Another example I’m proud of, as a founding sponsor, is the expansion of amazing neurodiverse talent at EY. We know how important it is to create opportunities for people of a diverse range of backgrounds to advance. We are proud of the growth over the past eight years of our Neurodiverse Centers of Excellence (NCoE) that provide tailored job opportunities for neurodiverse talent. Our colleagues in this space have helped to greatly expand the talent at EY that works on AI, blockchain, cyber, data, and other key aspects of our work. In FY24, EY launched three new NCoE centers, bringing our total to 23 cities across 13 countries. What started as an initiative to broaden our talent base to meet growing demands has also expanded our understanding that talent comes in many forms, from diverse backgrounds, and with a wide range of skills that deserve to be valued and appreciated.

**Do you feel there are strong opportunities for women in leadership roles in the industry?**

In my role, I have had a front row seat to women’s success across EY and professional services. Great strides have been made across our firm and our industry over the last two decades. At EY, we’ve made significant progress in improving gender equity. Today, women’s retention is on par with men’s within the organization. Additionally, we have women represented at all levels of our firm, including our CEO. Recently, Janet Truncale’s appointment as EY’s first woman Global Chair and CEO further

demonstrates our dedication to advancing women at every level, and to sustaining a workplace where everyone’s contribution is recognized and valued.

I see that opportunities for women in leadership roles within our industry are growing, and further progress depends on our ability to build inclusive cultures where all people can thrive. At EY, we are committed to fostering an environment where women can rise to leadership, driving both organizational success and social equity. Our research with the Peterson Institute shows that gender-diverse leadership can improve a company’s financial performance, and we see this impact firsthand. In fact, businesses within EY that have more women partners have 10 percent greater revenues and 4 percent greater margin. That’s meaningful.

To empower women’s leadership beyond EY, we also invest in programs such as Entrepreneurial Winning Women, the Women Athletes Program, and NextGen Women in Strategy and Transactions. These initiatives provide mentorship, resources, and community support to help women thrive.

**What advice do you offer to young people interested in pursuing a career in professional services?**

For people pursuing a career in professional services, the key is to embrace continuous learning, advocate for yourself, and build a strong support network. That’s true for any age, but agility and curiosity are key. It’s also critical to develop both technical and soft skills. As technology evolves, we look for individuals who are curious, innovative, and have an analytical mindset. Professional success also depends on cultivating a global perspective and collaborating across diverse teams.

I also believe one of the best ways to grow in your career is by actively seeking feedback. At all levels, feedback helps identify gaps and areas for improvement, and it can be a powerful tool for growth. Keep the door wide open for feedback and view it as a gift, even if it stings a little.

Lastly, don’t underestimate the value of sharing your accomplishments. It’s not boasting, but showcasing your value. I encourage you to share your achievements to demonstrate your value, the work you do, and what you care about. ●