DIVERSITY

TABLE OF EXPERTS

EQUITY & INCLUSION

BY HOLLY DOLEZALEK
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

SPONSORED BY
MODERATOR
Tiffany Orth
GREATER MSP Partnership

Tiffany Orth is the Director of Operations for Strategic Initiatives at the GREATER MSP Partnership. In this role, Tiffany is focused on building GREATER MSP’s new Strategic Initiatives Hub into a center of operational excellence for the organization and the Partnership. Tiffany previously managed the Make It: MSP initiative and provided support to GREATER MSP’s regional economic development strategy team. Prior to joining GREATER MSP, Tiffany worked in a variety of governmental and political roles, including serving as a Project Coordinator for the MN Sports Facilities Authority, the public entity charged with planning and designing U.S. Bank Stadium and managing the gubernatorial appointments process for judicial and state agency positions in the Office of Governor Mark Dayton. She also supported Governor Dayton’s 2010 Transition Team and has worked in fundraising for various political campaigns. Tiffany earned her bachelor’s degree in Political Science and Journalism from the University of St. Thomas.

PANELISTS
Jennifer Bonine
AI Appstore and PinkPowered AI Foundation

Jennifer Bonine is the CEO of AI Appstore, Inc., and was the first female Artificial Intelligence (“AI”) platform tech founder and CEO. AI Appstore specializes in custom subscription technology bundles, leveraging an intelligent platform to recommend actions and changes in your business. They create “virtual research assistants” in your company to be your AI platform for engagement with intelligent decision making capabilities for competitive advantage. The company expects expectations of integration, testing, delivery, and management with a groundbreaking business model that is fully engaged in the sustainable development goals (“SDGs”) cultivated by the United Nations. Respected as a gifted speaker, entrepreneur, author, and philanthropist, Jennifer Bonine addresses the AI industry nationally and internationally. She has held executive level positions leading teams for Oracle and Target and is a founding board member of the United States bid for a Minnesota World Expo 2027. Jennifer is a founding sponsor and member of IOWAy AI’s Women in History Data Ireadion Challenge, and an executive board member of Chad Greenwood’s Lead the Way Foundation. She is a member of Million Dollar Women, member and sponsor of TeamWomen, and is an executive leadership team member and tech platform sponsor of DreamTank, an organization designed to champion young entrepreneurs.

Vikesh Nemani
RBC Wealth Management

Vikesh and his team lead projects that develop the Private Client Group’s business strategy, and help optimize strategic and economic performance. The team provides analysis and support to senior management on strategic initiatives, branch and complex strategy, advisor and branch management compensation, financial reporting, real estate and advisor recruiting. Vikesh also helps guide the long-term management of the firm’s compensation spending by providing expert knowledge of industry compensation strategies and developing and administering advisor and branch management compensation programs. Prior to joining RBC Wealth Management – U.S., Vikesh worked as a senior consultant at Deloitte & Touche and as a financial analyst at U.S. Bank. Vikesh earned a Bachelor of Commerce degree from the University of Kolkata and his MBA in banking and finance from Case Western Reserve University. He is a graduate of the Securities Industry Institute at Wharton and is a member of the RBC Wealth Management – U.S. Diversity Leadership Council.

Mary Beth Ruthford
RSM

Mary Beth Ruthford is the Director of Client Experience at RSM Minneapolis. Mary Beth previously served as the Management Consulting Leader for the North Central Region, but in 2018, she saw a need and created a brand new role for RSM. Now she works with client teams across their tax, audit, and consulting practices to drive strategic pursuits, ensure accountability, and help teams deliver RSM’s client-centric strategy and the Power of Being Understood. Mary Beth is also the Central Region leader for RSM’s Diversity, Culture, and Inclusion program. She has been with RSM for 11 years, is a graduate of Carleton College and Baker University, and is an avid Vikings fan – so avid that she recently got married at US Bank Stadium, but no, not during an actual Vikings game.

Ouraphone Siriouthay Willis
UnitedHealth Group

Ouraphone Siriouthay Willis joined UnitedHealth Group in 2008. She is Vice President of Engagement, Inclusion and Diversity. She is responsible for global diversity and transitioning military and veteran initiatives and sits on many boards, including the Leading Women and Girls Forward (LSWGF); National Association of Women in Banking (NAWB) ; and the Association of Financial and Business Women (AFBW). Ouraphone graduated with a B.A. in Journalism from the University of Minnesota. She serves on the Board of Directors for the National Association of Asian MBA, the Summit Academy OIC and as the vice chair of the National Corporate Advisory Board of Prospanica. She’s a member of the MN National Association for Asian American Professionals and the MN Corporate and Community Coalition. In her spare time, she’s an aspiring Food Network star and loves to entertain her family and friends.

While always important, the topic of DEI has been shoved into the spotlight during these unprecedented times with the crises of COVID-19, the killing of George Floyd and the ensuing unrest. As more time has passed from the initial shock of these events, the focus has been shifting from immediate commitments and listening sessions to ensuring organizations can sustain long-term action and can be held accountable to real impact. Tiffany Orth: Vikesh, as a Minneapolis-based company, how has RBC responded to George Floyd’s killing and all the events that unfolded afterwards? Vikesh Nemani: Some of the initiatives were already in place; others were a little bit more immediate. First, it started off with what we call listening sessions, where we had over 600 employees. We created space for them to talk about their experiences, feelings, emotions, and safely to express their views, talk to other people of the same race, and exchange ideas. We also had sessions on allyship for all employees, to provide an overview of race relations in the United States and how to become an ally.

RBC as a whole has committed to investing about $50 million over the next five years, and helping to create career pathways for employees and other youth in Black, Indigenous, and communities of color. We’ve encouraged people of color to seek leadership positions within the enterprise; we’ve enhanced our existing anti-racism and anti-bias training, and made that training mandatory for all employees. We’ve also included diversity and inclusion objectives as mandatory goals for all people managers. We want to continue to learn from other best practices that are being employed by other firms, and learn and refine this further. Tiffany Orth: With so much of the focus being put on DEI following these recent events, we’re hearing talk of “diversity and inclusion fatigue.” Do you see that playing out at RSM? Mary Beth Ruthford: I’m not seeing fatigue. On the client side there’s been a trend of being more aware of diversity and inclusion. On the client side, I think the conversation is actually happening more often. We’re hearing from clients who are looking at our website and proactively bringing up the things we’re doing well, as well as the places that they see opportunity for us to improve. On the employee side, we all know inclusion and diversity are the right things to do and that diverse and inclusive companies perform better. Our people keep asking for more conversation and ways to get involved, and how to be better allies and start conversations in what can be an uncomfortable space. We’re also seeing more and more of our people who are having their a-ha moments – they’ll have an experience that sheds more light on an issue and say “we didn’t realize this was something our people are struggling with,” and that opens new doors for new conversations and awareness. Over all, I’m really not hearing fatigue. It’s just different perspectives for how people are coming at it.

Ouraphone Willis: At UHG, we’re committed to creating a diverse work force because diverse teams have deeper connections to the organization and each other, experience respect and safety in their workplace, feel valued for who they are and can apply their talents in ways that make a difference. We work hard to attract, engage, and develop talent who understand and are responsive to communities where we serve, and create a culture where diversity and teamwork flourish.

There is no silver bullet when it comes to finding top talent, and so we have a comprehensive strategy to help us recruit exceptional talent. One of the tactics we have is having local and national partnerships that advance our goal in building that diverse workforce. Our partners help us attract talented, better support and engage with diverse communities and provide resources where they are most needed through board leadership and participation. Some of our partnerships include AARP, Advancing Minorities’ Interest in Engineering, Executive Leadership Council, Human Rights Campaign Foundation, INROADS, LGBT Reaching Out MBA (ROMBA), Management Leadership for Tomorrow, National Black MBA Association and Prospancia.

Because top talent is so hard to find, we’ve broadened the way we think about recruiting. For example, we consider how we can broaden our scope to other industries and locations, and expand our scope to include adjacent degrees and nontraditional educational backgrounds. We’re also leveraging our own employees and our employee resource group, or what we call Connected Communities, to help source talent through referrals. We also have a hiring program focused on specific segments. Our Military Internship Program is a strategic partnership between UnitedHealth Group and the Department of Defense SkillBridge Program providing
career skills training and reintegration to transitioning active duty service members across all branches of the U.S. Military. We also just launched our Disability Inclusion Internship Program. This program is a 12-15 week program in a cohort setting that offers a career development open to all individuals with disabilities who have a desire to gain corporate experience.

Additionally, we know there is a shortage of doctors and cultivating the next generation of leaders who understand the needs and real life experiences of the people and communities we serve cannot be overstated. As more Americans retire, we see a low number of diverse physicians, so we’re looking at ways to cultivate and grow that health care workforce. Some of our efforts to help build the healthcare workforce include the Diverse Scholars Initiative. Since 2007, the United Health Foundation has provided more than $23 million to fund nearly 3,000 scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students of color pursuing careers as primary care health professionals. We have also established a partnership with Atlantic University Center Consortium, which includes the Morehouse School of Medicine, to train and prepare the next generation of data scientists.

Tiffany Orth: That’s incredible.

Mary Beth Ruthford: When we’re thinking about recruiting, we find good talent, but they’re already committed to another employer, so we need to start earlier, maybe in high school. We’re also working on how to get people to think differently about the accounting profession. Most little kids aren’t saying, “Mommy, I want to be an accountant when I grow up!” and I have yet to see a trick-or-treater wearing a “consultant” costume.

But it’s an excellent career and lifestyle! It’s not just doctors and lawyers you see out on the golf course, so we want to give younger people – including a more diverse pipeline – more exposure to the whole of what we do.

Tiffany Orth: Jenn, how are you incorporating diversity of thought and other strategies to ensure you are building solutions that address the needs of a broader global population?

Jenn Bonine: If you look at the leading technology companies, you will find that there is a consistent lack of diversity. This has been documented over the last few years in a series of studies that have reported on how few people with diverse backgrounds are skilled in computer programming and applying for and securing jobs at these companies. This unfortunately means that the ideas and opinions of those with diverse backgrounds aren’t being reflected in the solutions that an appropriate and representative population will use. Every human being every day is interacting with and leveraging artificial intelligence solutions that may not be built in a way that appropriately suits their needs. AI will be deployed to determine factors such as: Will you get that loan approval? Or, will you be granted access to certain assets and financial markets? There’s a movie coming out in the Twin Cities Film Festival called “Coded Bias,” which actually reports on MIT research that reveals the top tech companies in the world are aware that their systems are biased and that the data they’re using to make determinations and decisions isn’t truly authentic. AI Appstore is committed to bringing in a diverse perspective, and that involves really leveraging youth and how they see challenges and problems today and then including folks who are in different intergenerational stages of their life – people who have different experiences, socioeconomic backgrounds. All of that is important to us in how we’re building these solutions.

Tiffany Orth: I’m so glad you and others are tackling technology from that lens. Jenn Bonine: Imagine right now the personal AI is being leveraged, who has access to that data, and how it’s being used in our personal lives.

Tiffany Orth: Vikesh, the financial advice sector has been called out as possibly the least diverse profession in the U.S. How do you respond to that? And what can you say about what RBC is doing to change that?

Vikesh Nemani: The demographics of the country are changing rapidly. If our communities are changing, we need to

ADVERTISING SUPPLEMENT TO THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

YOU CANNOT MAKE SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS IN YOUR DIVERSITY METRICS OVERNIGHT.

YOU HAVE TO BE INVESTED IN THIS.

Our core values, business priorities and key strengths

Our diverse, inclusive teams develop unique insights tailored to your growing business. The experiences that make each of us uncommon will set you apart, too.

Experience the power of being understood.

Find out more at rsmus.com

THE POWER OF BEING UNDERSTOOD
AUDIT | TAX | CONSULTING

RSM

At RBC Wealth Management, we believe diversity and inclusion are an engine for innovation, progress and economic prosperity. Our commitment to inclusivity creates opportunities that empower people to grow and achieve their goals, and is the heart of everything we do for our employees and our communities.

To see our values in action, visit us at:


Investment and insurance products: • Not insured by the FDIC or any other federal agency • Not a deposit of, or guaranteed by, the bank or an affiliate of the bank • May lose value

© 2020 RBC Wealth Management, a division of RBC Capital Markets, LLC, Member NYSE/FINRA/SIPC. All rights reserved.
Connecting the world to better health, one person at a time

To learn more, visit uhc.com
ONE OF THE THINGS THAT CONCERNS ME RIGHT NOW IS THE IMPACT THAT THE PANDEMIC IS HAVING ON WOMEN. THEY’RE PROJECTING THAT WOMEN ACTUALLY WENT BACKWARDS WITH REGARD TO THE EQUITABLE PAY GAP OVER THE LAST SEVEN MONTHS. SO IF WE DO NOTHING DIFFERENTLY, IT’S GOING TO TAKE 150 YEARS TO CLOSE THE PAY GAP BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN.

If people live alone and they’re feeling isolated, especially in Minnesota winter, we want to make sure that people have resources and a network they can rely on. I think it really did help with that sense of community with our ENGs; we had more people getting involved in more events, even in a “virtual” world. We also try to use a variety of communication formats to reach as many of our people as possible, including sending out podcasts and pre-recorded videos, more casual virtual gatherings, as well as live, yet virtual conversations with as much interaction as possible.

Jenn Bonine: We have created a virtual platform that leverages AI to create a virtual workspace. Imagine a virtual headquarters; there are four walls in your virtual office, and [virtual] spaces that are dedicated to certain corporate activities. So if a group of people wants to have a discussion about diversity or another work-related topic, other participants can virtually join the conversation. We’re working with a lot of big corporations to virtually connect their workforce. Imagine—when someone visits your corporate headquarters, you can invite them to join the experience as a guest, so everything from recruiting to onboarding encourages engagement through virtual presence. Suppose an avatar of your CEO is giving a speech about corporate values when someone enters the virtual lobby. This individual can become familiar with your values on diversity and inclusivity and then take part in a quiz and a poll and share what they feel and think as part of the process.

Ouraphone Willis: I love that, Jenn. That virtual environment sounds amazing. We also like to use virtual platforms for our career events. We actually have two that are coming up, one that’s for disability; to celebrate disability employment awareness month in October, and one that’s for veterans that’s coming up to celebrate Veteran’s Day. We use a platform to create that virtual environment where it’s exactly like if you were to go to a physical career event. You have the ability to talk to leaders and recruiters, download materials and give us the opportunity to meet candidates where they are at. When I think about the virtual environment, I also think about how it impacts the disability community. UnitedHealth Group is committed to meeting the needs of the disability community and I have dedicated resource on my team that leads our disability strategy for the enterprise. With the move to more team members working virtually, when we get on a call and we say, “Can you hear me? Can you see me?”—that can take on a whole different meaning for someone who has a disability. It’s important to keep inclusivity at the top of mind in every situation.

Tiffany Orth: Any last comments?

Jenn Bonine: One of the things that concerns me right now is the impact that the pandemic is having on women. They’re projecting that women actually went backwards with regard to the equitable pay gap over the last seven months. So if we do nothing differently, it’s going to take 150 years to close the pay gap between men and women.

Mary Beth Ruthford: I think it’s important to have forums like this to share, discuss, benchmark and provide transparency into our I&D work and efforts. Recently we published our first Sustainability Report that highlights actions across the company to build a health system that works better for everyone. The report represents our commitment to openly and transparently share information and updates on our long-standing commitment to sustainability, including our environmental, inclusion and diversity, social and governance efforts. I think the more we can share, the more we’ll have that continuous learning from each other that will help us continue to drive and challenge ourselves to innovate and come up with radical approaches to how we do and lead I&D differently than how we always have done it in the past.

Tiffany Orth: I think this panel has dispelled any notion of fatigue in DEI.

Vikesh Nemani: The divide between rich and poor is expanding, especially in some communities of color. So there’s no time more important than now for us to speak up in our communities and the companies that we work for, because anything we can do to help is going to go a long way.

Leveraging Humanized AI Solutions

to build an inclusive future of work that empowers your global workforce and allows them to use “virtual research assistants” to free up valuable time in their days.

We are a Minnesota born and bred “AI Tech for Good” company.

aiappstore.com