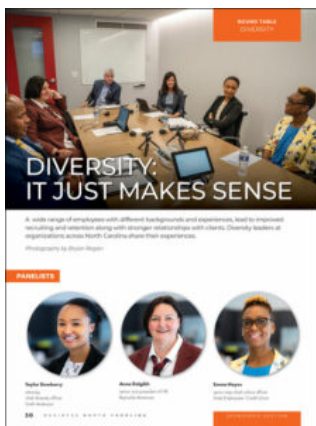


OCTOBER 2023



Round Table: Diversity

 By **BusinessNC** 10/01/2023



Click image above to view full PDF.

●●● SPONSORED SECTION ●●●

A wide range of employees with different backgrounds and experiences, lead to improved recruiting and retention along with stronger relationships with clients. Diversity leaders at organizations across North Carolina share their experiences.

*BASF, Fidelity, Reynolds American, Robeson Community College, Smith Anderson and State Employees' Credit Union sponsored the discussion. It was moderated by Chris Roush, executive editor of **Business North Carolina**. It was edited for brevity and clarity.*

PANELISTS

Taylor Dewberry

attorney
chief diversity officer
Smith Anderson


Anna Dolgikh

senior vice president of HR
Reynolds American


Emma Hayes

senior evp-chief culture officer
State Employees' Credit Union


Kristen Robinson

head of asset management board program
and N.C. regional leader
Fidelity Investments


Dr. Johnny Smith

vice president of instruction
and student support services
Robeson Community College


Courtney J. White

head of human resources
BASF Agriculture Solutions North America

WELCOME TO THE BUSINESS NORTH CAROLINA DIVERSITY EQUITY AND INCLUSION ROUND TABLE. OUR ROUND TABLE MEMBERS WILL INTRODUCE THEMSELVES AND TALK BRIEFLY ABOUT DIVERSITY IN THEIR ORGANIZATION.

ROBINSON: My name is Kristen Robinson, and I'm the head of our asset management board program at Fidelity Investments. But I am also one of the site leaders in North Carolina for Fidelity. We have about 8,000 associates in this amazing state of ours. I'm proud to say that we are the most diverse region that we have across Fidelity, which has about 75,000 associates worldwide. When I think about diversity, I think about how I need to represent all of our associates on our campus. That means we need to make sure that there's a very inclusive environment so that they can show up being themselves. Also, as we think about supporting our customers, they expect to see diversity, and they expect to see themselves at our company.

DEWBERRY: I am Taylor Dewberry. I am the chief diversity officer at Smith Anderson. I'm also an employment attorney, so that goes hand in hand together. We have over 200 employees. We're based in Raleigh and we are the largest business and litigation law firm in the Triangle and one of the largest in North Carolina. We do everything except for family and criminal law. I'm over our diversity mentorship programs and our programs to recruit, retain, and advance our diverse employees at our firm. The firm recently got Mansfield

certification, which means we considered at least 30% diverse candidates for recruitment and advancement opportunities at the firm, which was a huge milestone for us. We also are heavily looking into how we build our pipeline of diversity coming in so we are working with high schoolers, college students and law students to bring in the next generation of diverse attorneys.

HAYES: I'm Emma Hayes with North Carolina State Employees' Credit Union. State Employees' was early in its official DEI journey, so I've been in my role as what initially was the chief culture officer. Now I'm the chief learning and experience officer. In that role I am responsible for learning, leadership development, sustainability, equity, diversity and inclusion. We lead with equity, looking at providing equitable opportunities across our organization. We have about 8,200 employees. We're the second largest credit union in the nation. We are champions for the Eight Cooperative Principles, which include diversity and inclusion, considering all ways to provide equitable opportunities in all things, including learning and development. We are just now creating baselines for a lot of the work that we're doing as we continue to build out frameworks for some of our programs, which include retaining and recruiting diverse talent into our organization at all levels.

SMITH: My name is Dr. Johnny Smith. I serve as the vice president of instruction and student support services at Robeson Community College. We're excited to be able to work with people from the high school level all the way to our adult learners. And when we think about diversity, we are open, we are accessible. One of the things that we're also excited about is the fact that we have a minority male mentoring program. So we're endeavoring to work with our minority males, and show them enrichment opportunities and experiences. We're reaching out to our Hispanic population and making sure that they have an opportunity to join in their educational pursuits. We're just as excited about working with all people to make sure that everybody has an opportunity at education because we know education is the great equalizer, and it's so important to have that opportunity for not only educational advancement, but also for economic prosperity.

DOLGIKH: My name is Anna Dolgikh. I'm the chief human resources and inclusion officer for Reynolds American and a member of the broader British American Tobacco group. We're international and quite a diverse company. We are transforming the industry, we are transforming our portfolio. It's enormously critical for us to ensure that we get diversity and inclusion right more than ever, because we need different ideas, we need to ensure that the culture is catering for that. So we've been very pointed in our efforts, starting from the recruitment into the development within the organization. We're inviting employees to participate in a lot of dialogue. Employee resource groups have been a real success story for us. We are also thinking about what are the right enablers that we need to put in place. How do we create a long-term sustainable company where people can be their best authentic selves?

WHITE: I'm Courtney White with BASF. I am the head of human resources for agricultural solutions in North America. I'm also the global head of diversity, equity and inclusion for the operating division as well. BASF is the largest chemical company in the world. DEI takes everybody understanding the fact that everyone has something to bring to the table.

Honestly, we always say that we want to be considered the No. 1 employer in our industry and across all the industries. In order to do that, it really takes ensuring that we have programs, policies, and have every facet that shows that we're living our convictions. We're living who we are and we do it in a natural way such that we have a culture that not only recruits, but also retains individuals from different backgrounds. There is a saying that "customers will never love a company whose employees don't love it first."

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES IN TERMS OF IMPROVING DIVERSITY AND GETTING PEOPLE ON BOARD FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION EFFORTS?

HAYES: We have changed the meaning of diversity, equity and inclusion. We've always considered ourselves to just go out and get good talent. I think we need to recognize the landscape of North Carolina is changing. To remain relevant, we have to ensure that we mirror the people we serve. And there's no way to do that without intentionality. I think some people hear that and think there are groups of people that you're trying to exclude. That is the challenge of where we are in this very political environment. The challenge is having to break down the misconception that programs for diversity, equity and inclusion are exclusionary, because they're not, they're quite the opposite. A lot of people have this automatic impression that we're talking about race, or gender, or sexual orientation or identity. And really, it is so much larger than that. So I simplify it and say: "When I say 'diversity,' what we're saying is anything that makes us different." There are no two people who are exactly alike. How then do we celebrate and invite differences into our organization? So changing the language to ensure that people don't get the wrong impression about the programs that we want to put in place has been a recent challenge.

DOLGIKH: I can build on that elephant in the room. One of the biggest challenges we have is the tobacco stigma. When we recruit, we have that barrier to overcome, which is a challenge. But, it's also an opportunity because it pushes us to innovate. We get a lot of people who want to help us change and this is amazing. Then comes the retention. How do you continue to stimulate?

We have people from different industries and different backgrounds. How do you get all that talent that we are bringing in and ensure that it's sustainable. It keeps us on our toes. But it's a good place to be in a way I think that really pushes us to think differently. We learn fast, try things. Sometimes we realize that something probably was not the best idea, but we move on and try something else.

ROBINSON: We've had a diversity and inclusion annual report for the last three years. We do it voluntarily. We do it because we want transparency and accountability. When we share it with our associates, they say, "Well, what does good look like?" I think the fact is, especially with a company that's growing, the pie is getting bigger. So even if you make tremendous progress and double the amount of people of color that you've hired, year over year, when you look at the percentages, it still looks diluted. And I think one of the challenges is making sure that people understand that you have to keep pushing forward, you're never done. I think that really making sure that people understand what that actually means is something that for us has been exciting. Because of the transparency, we're able to have the conversation and have that platform.

HOW DO YOU GET SENIOR EXECUTIVES TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF DEI EFFORTS?

DEWBERRY: It's a point that our customers are asking us for. I think a lot of us have discussed this before. People are looking for teams that look like them, or teams that have people that can bring different perspectives not just for the perspective of being diverse, but having those people on your team is a better team. Having people looking at things from different angles and different backgrounds is going to build a better work product. This is a retention effort. But this is also an effort to make us produce better work and a better product for our clients.

WHITE: I think what we find is that there's not one way, and oftentimes people are hoping for the blueprint and what you find is that it takes multiple ways. For example, if you're trying to advocate for others, and also decision makers to be a part of the hiring process, you may find that with one an emotional discussion around why this is the most humane thing to do is effective. But for another it may be the fiscal return that should be expected. I was in a session and I had to talk about what's the value proposition. I took the research and turned it into what that means for the organization. I say, "When you read McKinsey or Gartner (business research), it shows that only 28% of people show up to work every day actually caring about what they do. So what happens if we get the rest of them, the 72%?" Once that statement was made, all of a sudden I got a lot more people on board.

ROBINSON: Another part we're thinking a lot about is our future customers. If you think about it, the millennial generation, they will comprise an extra 75% of the workforce in 2025. The largest cohort within that is bilingual, Hispanic individuals. McKinsey has all this great data that says the more diverse teams perform better. The numbers don't lie. When you think about what's coming, it's so incredibly important to be thinking about programs that you can resonate with your customer base. And again if your associates do not see themselves, then I think that it starts breaking down.

SMITH: I think about the different ways that we have to reach out to our learners, whether they are adult learners, whether they are in the early college setting, whether they are in adult high school, or whether they're working on their GED. They have different learning modalities. Some folks want to learn online, and we're trying to say come back to school. We really want to re-engage with these adult learners and these students, but many of our learners have now found that online, this virtual stage, has been a great way for them to learn. And so I think those challenges in the classroom and outside of the classroom are: How do you engage this learner? Is it teaching a high-flex class, face-to-face or totally online? Dr. Dallas Herring, who is known as the father of the N.C. community college system, said meet students where they are and take them as far as they can go. And that's essentially what we're endeavoring to do is to meet every learner, and trying to customize, individualize their learning experience where they are, and take them as far as they can go. We're not comparing their experiences to someone else's. That is what we're endeavoring to do in higher education.

DEWBERRY: I think Dr. Smith made a great point about the hybrid workforce that we as employers are looking at too, because you have people who are most comfortable working at home. Well, how does your employer make you feel belonging, and included when you're at home? So we're trying to come up with all these different ways. Let's do some virtual opportunities. Let's have more one-on-one sessions versus big group employee sessions. We're trying to work with this new world that COVID has created with hybrid, in-person or fully virtual employees.



SOME EMPLOYERS SAY THAT HYBRID WORK HAS HELPED THEM INCREASE THEIR DIVERSITY BECAUSE IT HAS ALLOWED THEM TO BRING IN NON-TRADITIONAL WORKERS.

HAYES: Before the pandemic, we never hired outside the state of North Carolina. And now we have employees across the country. So it's definitely helped, because there are some challenges in reaching talent. It gave us an opportunity to invite people outside of North Carolina, in small numbers, but for very specialized skill sets that we needed. Skill sets that we were having challenges finding because we live and work in a state with big tech. When you think about your Red Hats and your Ciscos ... how do we as an employer compete with other tech companies for employees when you're here in North Carolina. So we had to leverage talent outside of North Carolina to meet some of those specialized type skills, particularly IT, where employees in the state have so many options. So it was a difficult challenge for us.

ROBINSON: We hired 15,000 associates across the country last year. And 43% of those hires were people of color, and 42% were women. Hybrid and remote work opened up a tremendous opportunity to have people in different places. Something that often we don't talk about is the diversity of location.

HAYES: We've certainly seen the same thing. All of our employees were here in North Carolina. So that is a myopic view when you think about geography. Although the state itself is very diverse it's still very much North Carolina. When you want to innovate, when you want to have an opportunity to challenge yourself, you get less of that when everyone's experience is very similar. Opening up our talent pool and inviting a few people from outside

of North Carolina. It's been very, very helpful to have some of that diversity of thought.

CAN YOU GIVE ME AN EXAMPLE OF SOMETHING THAT IS REALLY WORKING WELL?

WHITE: We moved to what we refer to as impact-based hiring, which basically suggests that we need to challenge ourselves on the traditional ways that job descriptions are written. The natural tendency of a hiring manager, if a role is vacant, is to write the role based on the person who was just in it. Often that person has retired. "You need to have this number of years experience, you need to know how to do this, etc." The goal for us is to say, "Is that really what you need?" Or can a candidate have skill sets, competencies and capabilities that suggest that you can create impact? And if you can create impact, and then you will learn what we will teach you in that role? Does that make you a viable candidate? And what we found is the answer is yes. We have hired individuals who didn't meet what you would refer to as a traditional profile for a role that helped us increase our diversity numbers. Impact based hiring ... has been in place now for about four years.

DR. SMITH, CAN YOU TALK MORE ABOUT THE MENTORSHIP PROGRAM AT YOUR COMMUNITY COLLEGE?



SMITH: What we know is that the minority males mentoring circles have important opportunities for enrichment. It's important to get our students outside of where they live, where they normally function, and allow them to see different spaces. One of the things I did at another community college with this particular population is I took this group, I taught a sociology class, and I created a civil rights travel study that was embedded in this course. I took the men to Tuskegee, Alabama, where we went to Booker T. Washington's home and we saw Dr. George Washington Carver's sweet potatoes — they're still in formaldehyde over there. We got to go to the Red Tails hanger. We went to Selma. We walked the Pettus Bridge. We pretty much tracked where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. may have been. We captured that moment of Bloody Sunday. We took the learning, we made the world the classroom. We took these men on a journey that I think they won't forget. What we found also that is important is that accountability is a component. These men wanted to be accountable to someone, someone they respected, and also somebody that they felt like really cared for them. Not just in the classroom but outside the classroom. When we start talking about minority male mentoring programs. We use Tony Dungy's book, "*Uncommon*," in which he talks about being a good man and good parent.

At my former institution, the wife of one of the men came up to me and said, "You have given me back a better husband." His family was better; his kids were better. To think we were able to get that out of a minority males mentoring program.

At Robeson Community College we are looking to do the same thing to make sure we are creating a warm, welcoming environment where we feel our men can express themselves and they feel that sense of belonging. Our minority males really look for: "Do I fit here? Do I feel comfortable here?" ■

