

Troubled Times: Silence is Not an ‘Option’

“Times like these are unfortunate reminders of why our focus on diversity and inclusion is so critical; and clearly there is still much more work to be done.”

This is an excerpt from an email sent to a host of Sodexo (No. 6 on the 2016 DiversityInc Top 50 Companies for Diversity list) employees working in a cross section of diversity functions written by Rohini Anand, the company’s senior vice president of corporate responsibility and global chief diversity officer. Anand shared her concern and resolve in the aftermath of racial tensions that have led to death and despair for so many:

“I am disheartened by the ongoing acts of violence, terrorism and destruction that continue to plague our communities around the world. It is more important than ever, during times like these, that we reaffirm our commitment to Diversity & Inclusion.”

The letter was sent out on July 11 to Sodexo’s Employee Business Resource Group (EBRG) members, as well as INclusion commUNITY, Regional INclusion Ambassadors, Spirit of Mentoring Implementation Team and Diversity Learning Lab facilitators.

The day after five Dallas police officers were shot in the aftermath of two videotaped killings of Black men by cops in Minnesota and Louisiana, Steve Howe, U.S. chairman and managing partner for EY Americas, took to Twitter and also sent an internal email to the entire EY workforce to address the issue. (EY is No. 3 on the Top 50 list.)

And PricewaterhouseCoopers (No. 5) held a discussion about the issue across the company.

The call for these conversations — which were held informally among colleagues — was prompted by an email Tim Ryan, PwC’s U.S. chairman, sent following the Dallas shootings to all 45,000 employees in the United States, acknowledging the violence happening around the country, said Nidhi Sinha, a spokeswoman for the company.

It’s all part of an effort to put these difficult discussions on the table as a way to foster change. Sinha said there was one employee who commented that “the silence was deafening” following the recent turmoil, because no one among her team would even address it. That apprehension, she added, is why Ryan wanted to initiate a dialogue.

Companies are looking to use conversations as a springboard for possible actions to improve race relations and diversity.

Sodexo intends to promote further discussion and understanding. Sodexo, said Jodi Davidson, the company’s director, diversity & inclusion initiatives, has plans to:

- design race relations communications/programming to include leadership messages,
- create a toolkit with resources,
- hold dialogue sessions and webinar series,
- sharpen its focus on this topic at an upcoming inclusion meeting in September that consists of EBRG and INclusion commUNITY national leaders and their executive sponsors.

Why do all of this?

Silence on this issue wasn’t an option, Davidson stressed. “If we did not do something, people would be scratching their heads questioning why we were silent. If we truly want to fulfill our mission of quality of life, anything other than walking the talk is not an option.”



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