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Career snapshot

I have a degree in economics and began my career as an auditor before moving into retail, first working for Waitrose and then joining Asda as CFO in 2012. I'm now based at Walmart's HQ, in Arkansas. I'm married with two kids and a dog – a cockerpoo who likes to join in my Zoom meetings. We live a very outdoor lifestyle; my son loves mountain biking and I do a lot of road cycling.



Walmart's D&I journey

We've seen ourselves as leaders in D&I for quite a number of years and are making good progress on gender equality. For example, in Canada and Mexico the number of female store managers rose by 3% in the past year – in Mexico, 46% of store managers are now women. Progress on D&I moved forward during the pandemic. Meetings became more inclusive: there was no divide between the physically present inner circle and the dial-ins, and chairs could more easily see when participants wanted to speak. We got to know each other better, and as leaders we stepped up our levels of communication and engagement because we recognised the potential for isolation.

Walmart's approach

When you have a specialist function in charge of D&I, there is always a danger that people think someone else is taking care of it, whereas in fact people experience these issues in their team and with their line managers every day. Inclusion is a contact sport – you have to get involved.

We have an Inclusion Council, which I currently lead, and which involves senior people from every corporate function and business unit. The council has three areas of focus. First, education: we provide accessible learning materials and run live online panel discussions on topics such as unconscious bias and inclusive leadership. Second, the talent pipeline: we are developing our practices, covering everything from diverse slates to more equal development experiences. And third, planning, measurement and accountability: every officer across the business has objectives on D&I which form part of their appraisal and hence their pay. Currently we are improving the frequency and quality of our data across lots of areas, such as recruitment and exits, and we're tracking how these data are changing.

Learning 1: Tackle attrition risk

The risk of attrition is very real, and we have to find ways to address it. We have a unique opportunity to design more flexible working practices for the future – and we should all be doing that this year. My encouragement is to listen to your associates, to set some principles, but to experiment and iterate, and finally to collaborate and share experiences. And remember that those who get this right will win by retaining and attracting the highest-potential women leaders.

Learning 2: Prime the talent pump

On talent pipelines, companies need to start with the talent they have. In my organisation, I am looking far deeper down and using a 'Know, Mentor, Sponsor' model. We are spending time to get to know high-potential associates and building gender-equal mentor circles to do that. We are also thinking about real proactive and ongoing career sponsorship of women. As men it's worth asking yourself how much of that we really do? On external pipelines, there are several actions we can all take, from insisting on gender-balanced slates and anonymised resumés to ensuring interview panels are balanced.

Learning 3 : Make this a whole company fight

Don't allow inclusion to be the preserve of a few senior leaders and your office of diversity. Make this part of every leader's capability and an expectation for performance and advancement. Deliver scorecards to all your leaders, measure progress and tie to promotion and reward.



Next steps for Walmart

Inclusion is a journey with no destination – you have to continually improve. The George Floyd murder forced millions around the world to take a look at themselves in the mirror; I had no idea how little I knew about the history of race and systemic inequities. We have to listen, so we can understand the problem; learn, which means admitting our mistakes, vulnerabilities and biases; and commit, which means acting as allies, sponsors and mentors.

As a company we are also focusing on trying to crack the code of the future of work. Walmart will be redesigning offices and thinking about our working model – from remote to office based to hybrid. We will rethink working hours and we will think further about the use of technology – not just Zoom but virtual reality and other collaboration opportunities.

Contact us

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Next steps for our industry

In my view the changes that COVID has driven create both risk and opportunity. If we respond to the changes we are seeing with thoughtful leadership and with flexible thinking we can accelerate our goals for women in the workplace. It's clear that we won't be returning to the workplace we knew in 2019, and we have a rare opportunity to accelerate in a moment of change. We can signal to all that gender inclusivity isn't just an option – it's essential.