

HBR-published book serves as solid resource tool for DEI guidance, best practices

By **MELISSA CROCKETT MESKE**
macmeske@ibjonline.com

Dr. Ella F. Washington is an organizational psychologist and DEI expert, with a wealth of knowledge and experience to share that stems from her vocational path. She is the founder and CEO of Ellavate Solutions while also serving as a professor of practice at Georgetown University’s McDonough School of Business and co-host of Gallup’s Center of Black Voices Cultural Competence Podcast.

Washington is also the author of *The Necessary Journey: Making Real Progress on Equity and Inclusion*. As her first solo book, *The Necessary Journey* has been made available through the Harvard Business Review Press in 2022. In preparation for this month’s IBJ Spotlight on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, I had the chance to review a copy of Washington’s book.

Insights and best practices are presented throughout, as Washington shares multiple stories and examples of how various companies have, or have not, done the hard work necessary to become diverse, equitable, and inclusive. In fact, Washington said, “I have written this book deliberately as a series of narratives because I believe in their power to inspire and teach.”

“But I’m not relying on stories alone,” she continued. “Though each chapter is a narrative, my approach marries what we know from forty-plus years of academic research on DEI with the practical lessons I have learned in my work helping hundreds of companies on their DEI journeys.”

The attention given to DEI in 2020 forward has seemed new to many. But the reality is that the workplace challenge has been studied for over 40 years, first termed as diversity management.

Foundations for it were laid out in the 1950s and 60s with the Civil Rights Movement. President John F. Kennedy issued Executive Order 10925 in 1961,

requiring federal contractors to take “affirmative action” and end discrimination in their workplaces and their practices.

Kennedy’s order was followed by the formalization of Title II of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its creation of the EEOC, or Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

As far back as 1968 there is evidence of diversity management, such as when Xerox’s then-Chairman Joseph Wilson called on all of the company’s managers to increase hiring efforts of African Americans.

As Washington writes, however, “The center of DEI is humanity, and the challenges of bringing humanity into the workplace will always be changing.” And for so many companies, a much deeper introspection on DEI came in 2020 following the tragic death of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

One of the studies presented by Washington comes from Best Buy. Its headquarters is located just seven miles from the spot where Floyd had lost his life.

The author shared: “On that day, the Best Buy executive team gathered. CDO Mark Irvin remembered it clearly. ‘It was a catalyst moment,’ Irvin told Washington. ‘I remember going back to the executive team the day Floyd’s murder occurred, and I was talking to the executive team and our CEO, Corie Barry, leaned in and she said, We have to do better.’”

There are many other stories and anecdotes that any workplace can use and learn from inside the pages of *The Necessary Journey*. There are recommendations from CDOs and CEOs from companies of all sizes and scales. And as Washington points out, “Your organization should absolutely have a DEI strategy that considers the organiza-

tion’s entire sphere of influence. This is not a product launch. This is not a new line of business. DEI is a core cultural transformation.”

In what some might see as a recent contradiction to this, author Liz Ryan, the founder and CEO of Human Workplace, conducted a LinkedIn poll in May 2023 where she posed the question as to how DEI is interpreted by corporate executives today. She noted that she had done so in light of DEI professionals recently being hit hard by layoffs.

Ryan’s poll results indicated that corporate DEI was seen by 65 percent of those responding as “nice, but not essential.” Only 35 percent saw it as an essential business function.

The challenges of employing a willing, skilled, and diverse workforce continue, and Washington’s work might be far from over, if Ryan’s poll results are any indication.

SIUE Safe Zone hosts LGBTQIA+ ally, support training for University of Florida Health

The University of Florida (UF) Health is looking to Southern Illinois University Edwardsville on creating a program similar to SIUE’s Safe Zone program. Safe Zone works to develop allies and provide support to LGBTQIA+ students, faculty and staff on SIUE’s campus. SIUE hosted a virtual training for several diversity champions from across the UF Health System.

“Florida is currently one of the most hostile states when it comes to LGBTQIA+ equality, in particular towards transgender and non-binary individuals,” said Nick Niemerg, assistant director of constituent relations for university advancement and president of the Queer Faculty and Staff Association. “I am so proud that the advocacy and education work that we do at SIUE was able to be shared with our new friends at UF Health.”

Niemerg and Liz Stygar, M.A., instructor of sociology, coordinated and led the training. They covered topics such as gender inclusive language, LGBTQIA+ identity and development, bystander intervention, and how to be an ally for the LGBTQIA+ community.

“The academic health center of UF Health is comprised of the Colleges of Medicine, Pharmacy, Nursing, Dental Medicine, Veterinary Medicine and Public Health,” said Lakesha Butler, PharmD, BCPS, CDFT, associate vice president and chief diversity officer at UF Health and former SIUE School of Pharmacy professor. “Representatives from these colleges voluntarily participated in a Safe Zone train-the-trainer workshop because of their commitment to creating a more inclusive environment.”

“We now have a network of allies armed with the pertinent tools, knowledge and resources to equip others, thanks to our expert facilitators, Liz and Nick,” she continued. “The goal is to soon create our own Safe Zone workshops offered to health professional students, faculty and staff.”

“I am encouraged by the group of folks at UF Health who want to engage their campuses in creating more inclusive spaces, places for LGBTQIA+ folks and allies to feel a sense of belonging,” said Stygar. “I think the participants in the training, who are volunteering to be trainers themselves, know the work ahead is steep; they’re persisting with compassion. I am optimistic because there is power and strength in numbers.”

To learn more about SIUE’s Safe Zone visit siue.edu/lgbtqia.



Bright tomorrows start with
doing good today.

Millions of people rely on us to power their lives. Ameren is working hard to provide more reliable energy, reduce outages and restore power faster than ever before.

It’s all part of our ongoing commitment to keep pace with future energy needs, as we proudly continue to serve, support and invest in the communities we call home.

See how we’re strengthening the energy system for downstate Illinois at AmerenIllinois.com/Reliability.




Ameren
ILLINOIS

AmerenIllinois.com/Reliability