

The LongView



Insured Retirement Institute (IRI) is pleased to celebrate exemplary leadership within the insured retirement industry. Our monthly article series, *The Long View*, spotlights individuals who have proven adept at seeing change on the horizon and adapting accordingly. Through one-on-one interviews, we aim to learn about each highlighted leader's career, successes, failures, lessons learned, and proudest moments. [Click here](#) to view past articles.

Spend 15 minutes talking with Darryl W. Gibbs about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and one thing is sure thing to happen. You will walk away inspired by his vision of a brighter, more equitable future for our industry's employees and customers. You'll also gain a better understanding of the immense work required to achieve that vision. Mr. Gibbs, Equitable's Chief Diversity Officer, delivers on that delicate balance like the career lawyer he is—with passionate, reasoned arguments that inspire action. In his role, Mr. Gibbs is a member of the company's Operating Committee and is responsible for fostering a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment across the organization.



IRI interviewed Mr. Gibbs in February of 2021 and asked him about the experiences that inspired him to focus on DEI in his professional career as well as the measures he uses to evaluate the success of an effective DEI program.



Tell us about a learning moment in your life that helped mold you into the leader you are today.



The work my wife and I did with Father Flanagan's Boys' Home, a non-profit organization dedicated to caring for its children and families, really shaped my ideas about giving back, mentoring, and being involved with young people.

Early in our marriage, my wife and I lived with, and cared for, six teen boys who were in crisis. These boys had been abandoned and ordered to Boys Town by the family courts. Working with young people who were deeply traumatized by physical and mental abuse led me to understand the urgency of getting involved and giving back. It was the hardest job I ever had.

The lasting impact of that experience taught me how to lead with compassion and empathy. I believe you can influence people if you try and understand their personal journey. Understanding someone's identity is the cornerstone of effective diversity and inclusion work.



You earned a Juris Doctorate from St. John's University School of Law and then worked as corporate counsel for several organizations—including 15 years on the corporate counsel team at Equitable. Your career was squarely focused on corporate law before you stepped over to lead Equitable's DEI work. What prompted you to pursue this career shift?



Achieving racial equity in the workplace will be one of the most important issues that companies tackle in the coming decade. At Equitable, we came together as a leadership team to discuss racial equity's importance to the work we do and to figure out what we could proactively do to show our commitment to this priority. We must be an organization which strives to evolve and transform to be more representative of all races and cultures.

To that end, I felt very moved to leave my role in legal and transition to work in diversity and inclusion. I'm extremely proud of our CEO Taskforce to Advance Racial Equity, which we stood up in 2020 with a clear focus on strengthening representation and advancement of our

Black employees and financial professionals and enhancing the overall corporate experience of our Black community.



DEI initiatives are at the forefront for companies around the country. How should DEI programs measure their own success? What aspirational outcomes should we seek to achieve as an industry?



Every company will need to define clear priorities and measurable goals when it comes to their diversity and inclusion efforts. We need to build on the inclusion tools and practices of the past by making them more robust so we see significant and fundamental change. We need to maintain sharpened focus and innovate. At Equitable, we make it a point to say our racial equity work is about all of us—all races, cultures, and genders. It's in our collective best interest to work together to elevate under-represented communities.

In addition, companies should measure progress aligned to goals like the following: Are diverse employees being considered for leadership roles and/or roles that utilize their strengths and insights? Is the company offering mentorship and sponsorship programs with clear outcomes that elevate the diverse talent in your organization? And, is the company recruiting and retaining the thriving, diverse workforce that leaders and clients demand?



What is one best practice you'd recommend every company in our industry implement to advance DEI at their organization?



If you want more diverse leaders, start mentoring junior talent early. I believe every company should have a focused, diverse sponsorship program in which all senior leaders are required to participate. These programs ensure there is skin in the game—there is someone in your corner as you go for a promotion or the chance to work on a high-profile project. The intent is to create a governed sponsorship program that helps develop long-lasting and enduring relationships both personally and professionally.



You take great pride in sponsoring, mentoring, and motivating up-and-coming talent. Who or what are the motivators that keep you going in times of uncertainty?



I am thankful for the leaders that came before and broke a lot of glass for me to get here. Now it's my turn to help future generations overcome barriers and reach the top. I am so motivated daily by the people I work with at Equitable, especially my colleagues in the CEO Taskforce to Advance Racial Equity. They are a collective of adaptive servant leaders who are smart, hardworking, determined, and most of all, fearless. They inspire me and give me energy to keep going every day.



One of the most difficult aspects of leadership is knowing when to look ahead and find future possibilities or challenge the status quo. What key change have you been proudest to lead at Equitable?



We've developed a few key initiatives that I'm quite proud of including:

Launching our CEO Taskforce to Advance Racial Equity with a clear mission: to be the most sought-after employer for Black professionals by shattering racial inequities and building an Equitable that supports and invests in the careers and well-being of our Black employees and financial professionals. We've been very deliberate in how we've operationalized the Taskforce, down to the very words we have curated to speak about our effort. We use words like "shattering" and "building" to signify the breaking and restoration that this work requires, and we use "well-being" to show that we see each person holistically.

Overall, the taskforce has three goals: 1) Provide representation and advancement. If I can see it, I can be it. 2) Culture and experience. I can voice my opinion without fear, I will be heard, and I feel Equitable is a great place to work. 3) Performance. People are investing in my success and am I being assessed fairly.

In addition, we've launched an engaging speaker series program to continue to discuss important topics and create safe spaces for people to have courageous conversations about their experiences

with race. We've also just launched a robust learning and development program all focused on building equity and reducing subtle acts of exclusion. And, finally, I'm proud of the new Coalition of Insurance Companies that Equitable is leading in partnership with The Association of Wholesaling Diversity to continue to create awareness and opportunity in financial services for the Black community.



What are you most looking forward to doing or where are you most looking forward to going when pandemic-related travel and social distancing restrictions are lifted?



I really miss traveling! I can't wait to go back to restaurants and live sporting events here in Charlotte where I'm based but also in New York, New Orleans, and Atlanta—all cities I travel to regularly. I also love interacting with people and I look forward to traveling to conferences and events and meeting and talking with new and old friends.



Keep in touch!



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