

INNOVATOR

Ford's **Lori Costew** On Belonging

Lori Costew is the chief diversity officer and director of people strategy at Ford Motor Company. Her portfolio focuses on the company's diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) strategy. She assumed this role in June 2019 to cultivate a culture of belonging and advance the organization's mission and business objectives. Costew also ensures Ford's talent strategy supports corporate goals and transformation efforts.

Previously, Costew held positions within Ford leading human resources for the organization's mobility division, as well as The Lincoln Motor Company. Costew joined Ford in 1993 and for nearly three decades has worked in positions supporting marketing, UAW negotiations, equal employment planning and organizational development. Costew is also the author of two award-winning novels that provide inspiration and tools against bullying for children. Her first book is "Sherpa's Adventure: Saving the Future" and the sequel is, "Sherpa's Adventure: Destroying the Hologram."

Costew has a master's degree in human resources from The Ohio State University and a certification in executive coaching from the Hudson Institute. Born a Buckeye, she lives in Northville, Michigan with her husband and two children. She joins *i3* to discuss the importance of belonging and inclusion.

Q. How has making D&I a business imperative helped make your company stronger?

A. Great talent can go anywhere. At Ford, we know that it takes many different perspectives and backgrounds to create the innovative products, services and experiences our customers want. Finding and retaining those diverse voices is the only way to transform our company and deliver on our corporate strategy. To be successful, we must create a culture of belonging where everyone can bring their authentic selves to work.

Q. How are you working with employees and community partners to advance diversity and inclusion?

A. Internally, my team within the DEI Office advances diversity, equity and inclusion by working closely with our 11 employee resources groups (ERGs). While our ERGs have a proud history of serving and supporting their members and communities, we are capitalizing on the strengths of their lived expertise to help solve business problems and reach customers in new ways. We lead governance of DEI-related activities across the enterprise, provide experiences and events designed to educate and raise the awareness of all employees, create prototypes to improve the employee experience from recruitment to departure, and attract future diverse talent by engaging with professional organizations, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), and using software to support inclusiveness and gender neutrality.



What is your advice for companies beginning their D&I strategy?

A For companies big and small across all industries my advice is to start by listening deeply.

Leaders must create a safe space for people to share their life experiences inside and outside of your company. You will gain empathy and insights into the space between what you think your culture is, and how it is really experienced by others. Then you can focus your efforts to implement the most relevant, impactful solutions.

Externally, my team shares our work in the sector through the Ford Fund, the philanthropic arm of the company. From providing contributions to food banks and other organizations after natural disasters, to the #FinishStrong campaign donating masks to every state in our nation to counter the COVID-19 pandemic, we are able to impact many underserved communities. Ford is also proud of our decades-long, significant investments in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) and entrepreneurial community initiatives that affect lives every day.

Q. As you look to the future, what are some key lessons learned?

A. George Floyd's death was an awakening for so many of us. In response to the moment, we launched the U.S. salaried DEI audit, part of a comprehensive, global examination of the employee experience. This process revealed that many women, Black and Hispanic employees felt excluded and faced unique barriers along the employee journey. Listening deeply was critical. We held many listening sessions and focus groups that provided insightful observations on our company culture. The sessions, combined with workforce and policy evaluation data, taught us that we must lead with a culture of belonging for everyone and establish governance, transparency and accountability. The experience brought us to our North Star, the framework for DEI work, and the guide to the following mantra: "We are family. We celebrate our differences. We all belong." ■