



CRE BUSINESS > PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

## Success in DEI is a Journey That Needs to Start Today

*The implementation of DEI protocols in the property management industry isn't a sprint. It's a marathon.*

Barry Blanton | Mar 01, 2022

“Without diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), you simply won't retain top talent. Your hires, as diverse as they may be, will be less productive if they don't feel included, and without equity, they won't be able to move up the ladder, and they'll

leave.”

The speaker there is Clifton Williams, IREM’s recently appointed director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Williams, who comes to IREM with more than 20 years of business focus on DEI, clearly sees the link between smart hiring in the 21st century and the corporate bottom line. As I’ve stated before in this space and various presentations I’ve made, all of us are in a heated battle for top talent . And top talent today gravitates toward organizations that are DEI-forward.

When Williams joined IREM, just a few months ago, he helped coalesce into a major strategic initiative the efforts that have been evolving over a number of years. Of course, he won’t be moving the conversation alone. Any strategic initiative must have the support of leadership and membership to advance. It’s what 2022 Diversity Advisory Board chairperson Kaci Hancock, CPM, ACoM, calls “intentionality.”

## **Miles to go . . .**

“We as an industry and as an association have a long way to go,” she relates, indicating that commercial real estate is “among the least diverse industries on the planet , especially when it comes to C-Suite opportunities.”

We believe that, in this strategic initiative, we’re modeling the intentionality that corporate leaders need to adopt, in commercial real estate of course, but equally in all industries today. “You need the support of leadership in order to make great strides,” Hancock says, “and you need a clear plan that has buy-in throughout the organization.”

For us, that clear plan comes in the shape of roadmaps for our various initiatives, be it education, student and academic outreach, or Next Gen. “All of the roadmaps are different,” explains Williams. The common thread is the growth of those roadmaps from IREM’s overall strategic plan. “The roadmaps bring the goals of the strategic plan into practice.”

The implementation of DEI protocols isn't a sprint. It's a marathon, and as Williams points out, "as we work on the goals contained in the roadmaps, each advisory board can state what they want to accomplish, what their timeframes will be, and what measures they want as their outcomes. Progress is the most important achievement."

## **One Size Need Not Fit All**

He also notes one important fact that corporate leaders must keep in mind: While buy-in throughout the organization is key, it needn't be 100 percent. "Not everyone will be on board," he says. There are many reasons for this, including the fact that different locales vary in the diversity of their population. Taking that issue to heart, he emphasizes the importance of providing IREM chapters throughout the IREM network with the tools and resources they need to mount a DEI initiative that fits their unique demographics.

For IREM, this buy-in obviously means gauging chapter involvement. "It's all right if not everyone is on board," Hancock says. "But part of our initiative is to figure out where those members and chapters are and what we can do—what they need from us—to help them better understand the strategic plan."

This chapter integration brings up a point vital to all organizations in real estate interested in enhancing their DEI approach. Local outreach is essential to hiring and retention, and as we all know, property management is not necessarily top-of-mind for students trying to define a career path. The messaging of organizations that have an active DEI commitment speaks volumes, especially to younger candidates who expect no less from their prospective employers. It's an inclusion that, to use Hancock's words, "is very appealing to jobseekers."

"Those companies realize that they'll reap the benefits from having double minorities and other under-represented groups on their staff," she continues. "It's not just a fad. It's a matter of sustainability."

It should be noted that, while the goals of each committee might be unique to them—just as they might be for various departments of a corporation—this isn't a siloed initiative. "On one hand, we won't conflict with each other because each advisory group will be working in their specific areas," Williams explains. "None of us will have the exact same goals." But there's also a natural integration of efforts—again, as there might be within corporate departments, such as property management and leasing—where coordination is called for. Of course, at IREM, Williams and Hancock are serving as primary leaders of the shared, overall DEI effort.

Whether the effort is being made at the association level or in the corporate space, we must always keep in mind that success in DEI is not measured by its perfection. As 2022 IREM president, my end-of-year speech will not contain the words "mission accomplished." What I care most about is that we're recognized—internally and externally—for walking the walk.

And where will that walk take us? On the path to fundamental change.

*Barry Blanton is the 2022 IREM president. In addition, he serves as chief problem solver and a founding principal of Blanton Turner, in Seattle, Wash.*

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