



REAL ESTATE LEADERS DISCUSS MOVING THE NEEDLE FORWARD WITH DEI

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It's hard to argue that "diversity" and "inclusion" haven't become some of the most prominent terms within the business lexicon. While both have become corporate imperatives in recent years, they've also catalyzed a long-overdue dialogue within companies.

The real estate sector has been no exception to this trend. Industry leaders spoke with RISMedia about taking targeted approaches to promote diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in their respective markets and companies and why it's important to act now.

Sue Yannaccone, president and CEO of the Realogy Franchise Group, says that recent years have provided a reality check that many companies needed to start making a change.

In a previous interview, Yannaccone stated that the "newfound focus on diversity" among businesses has often resulted in "symbolic gestures to 'check a box.'"

"We can't solve the myriad injustices across racial, ethnic and gender lines with a broad-brush approach; your solutions should be targeted and prescriptive," she said.

She didn't deviate from that stance the last time she spoke with RISMedia about ongoing efforts at Realogy and its subsidiaries to continue developing its DEI solutions in real estate.

"We realize that the programs that we have must have a real impact," Yannaccone says. "There are a lot of companies and people that will sponsor an event, but we really wanted to move past that checking the box, realizing that to have a real impact, you have to carry it through, and there has to be a continued evolution."

That ongoing evolution has been a north star for Realogy's efforts, according to Yannaccone, who notes that each program the real estate giant implements pursues specific goals to improve engagement among participants.

The company has tried to accomplish this through several initiatives like Coldwell Banker's Inclusive Ownership Program, which aims to support diverse broker/owners in their first two years. Realogy expanded the program to its brands and has had more than 30 companies participate in the program since its 2020 launch.

According to Yannaccone, the company has seen a 72% increase in gross commission income (GCI) through the program.

"That is a meaningful increase, but it's nowhere near done," she says, adding that Realogy continues to hone the program among others to continue moving the needle forward across the company and its brands.

In many cases, acknowledging the need for a change in real estate is a step that industry leaders are still working on these days, according to Kymber Lovett-Menkiti, regional director, Maryland/DC Region, Keller Williams Realty International (KW).

"There are some companies and brands that don't think there is a need to have the conversation, so I think that the first domino is the acknowledgment that there is a need for DEI to have a seat at the table," she says.

Lovett-Menkiti tells RISMedia that KW has engaged in nationwide dialogue among agents and leaders to source ideas on making a "sustained impact in the DEI space."

While part of that showed up in the form of KW amending its core beliefs and company values to include equity—admittedly a first for the company—she says the conversation has led the company to prioritize creating "opportunities for all" in real estate.

The open dialogue and effort to improve diversity in the industry goes a long way toward building trust among consumers, according to Juan Sanchez, a Denver-based real estate agent with CENTURY 21 Bear Facts Realty.

"The only way to help individuals is if we have their trust," he says. "The best way that we can earn their trust is to be upfront and honest with them, give them the education and talk to them as peers."

Sanchez says he has been connecting with local organizations to offer scholarship opportunities for people in underrepresented communities to become real estate agents.

According to Lovett-Menkiti, Keller Williams has taken a similar approach to education and lowering barriers to entry into real estate by launching the KW School of Real Estate (KSCORE), a national, fully digital real estate training program.

"Real estate is an unkept/untapped business in terms of your ability financially to succeed, and yet the entry point can be difficult, particularly in underserved communities," she says.

Promoting diverse leadership is also a priority, according to Lovett-Menkiti, who says that the KW has also developed a coaching program that provides a pathway for agents that want to become a broker/owner.

"If you look around and don't see people who look like you, it becomes hard for you to imagine what you could be," she says.



J. Lennox Scott, chairman and CEO of John L. Scott Real Estate echoed similar thoughts.

From setting up an internal committee dedicated to DEI efforts to promoting continued education among leaders throughout the brokerage, he says that he and his leadership team have prioritized outreach, invitation and engagement throughout the company.

"Together, we are creating a safe, supportive and productive environment for everyone, which leads into our business practice, supporting our clients," he says.

To do that, Scott suggests that education is a significant vehicle to help position his leadership team to become agents of change.

He purports that John L. Scott Real Estate has encouraged office leaders and executives to undergo DEI training through several programs that the National Association of REALTORS® (NAR) has developed.

The brokerage has had its entire support team participate in the NAR implicit bias and fair housing video training programs. Scott also says that 120 of its executive and office leadership members will participate in [NAR's LEAD DEI courses](#) in the coming months.

"This education affirms our business practices, and it reminds us to continue elevating the conversation," Scott says. "This is a journey taking place today to bring our awareness level up so we can take those next steps.

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