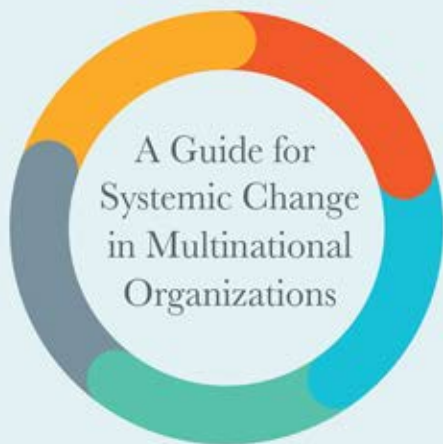


"A brilliant framework for
advancing global diversity,
equity, and inclusion."

— Hamdi Ulukaya, Founder
and CEO Chobani and Tent



LEADING GLOBAL DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

ROHINI ANAND

Foreword by Sophie Bellon, Sodexo board chair

PREFACE

I WAS EXCITED ABOUT GOING TO INDIA to launch diversity, equity, and inclusion work for Sodexo, a French global food services and facilities management company that I was employed with in the US. I was born in India, had spent my formative years there, traveled to India at least once a year, and spoke several Indian languages. In my mind, I had a good understanding of the culture.

In a small room in the Sodexo India offices in Malad, a suburb of Mumbai, I sat with twenty women who were employed in entry to mid-level management positions. They wore brilliantly colored *saris* and *churidar kurtas*. A few wore trousers. They were all delighted to have been selected to participate and were eager to engage. I was focused on implementing initiatives to advance women since the representation of women in the Sodexo India workforce was approximately 20 percent. We had seen the success of mentoring and leadership initiatives in the US and elsewhere, and I was convinced that we needed a similar approach to broaden opportunities for women in India.

The women sat patiently and quietly waiting for me to start the conversation. After a round of introductions, I told them why I was there. “I want to understand what your challenges are and how the company can help you advance in your careers,” I said. And then I started giving them examples of efforts that we had successfully implemented elsewhere. I talked about the benefits of leadership development and mentoring. I was met with blank stares. I could tell that I was just not connecting with them. I tried a few Hindi phrases to break the ice and to signal I was one of them . . . still no reaction.

I had the best of intentions; I was trying to help them. After all, having grown up in India, I, more than anyone, understood what they needed. But something was not working! It was only when I paused to ask the women what would be helpful in advancing their careers, that one of them gingerly raised her hand and said, “Rohini, Ma’am, we live with our in-laws and have to take care of them and of the house and our children. If we stay late at work to finish our project, our mother-in-law gets angry.” The other women nodded, and then another raised her hand and said, “And even if our mother in-law is home all day, we still have to take care of our children and cook the evening meal when we get home.” They were on a roll—clearly this topic had struck a chord. Another chimed in, “And they don’t care what we are doing at work; they just want us to make a salary and do all the housework.”

Wow! I had completely forgotten the multigenerational joint-family dynamic in India where many couples live with the husband’s extended family and the daughter-in-law is expected to take care of all the housework! I had forgotten the role of the Indian woman, not only as a mother and wife, but also as a daughter-in-law. And, I had forgotten my own limitations as a multidimensional being—focused on one aspect of my shared identity with these women and overlooking the many differences.

I was at a loss as to the solution to this dilemma until, once again, I asked them how we could help. Again, these women came through and offered up a solution. They asked us to host a recognition day with awards and to invite their extended families. I have to say that the awards day was a highpoint in my diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work in India! The extended families were so proud of their family members who worked at Sodexo, and the women were beaming. Did it shift the dynamic at home? I learned that it did, slightly; many of the women could occasionally stay to finish a project without feeling conflicted, and sometimes they even came home to meals prepared by their mothers-in-law!

One of the earliest lessons I learned through this experience in my self-discovery journey is that it is not useful to export initiatives that may have worked “at home” to other parts of the world where they have little relevance. This experience drove home to me a stumbling block in global inclusion transformation work—the temptation to assume that I understood a place without checking out my presumptions. Clearly, I needed to do my own work as a change agent—we all do. This takes self-awareness. If I was going to be successful in changing mindsets and behaviors, I could not stop investing in my own discovery work. Instead of dispiriting, I found these flashes of insight into myself exciting. I was on the edge of my learning curve.

In leading global DEI for over thirty years, I have come to increasingly appreciate the complexity of the work. I have caught myself applying my own limited, one-dimensional worldview to make sense of situations that are unfamiliar to me, which is antithetical to the very outcome that we are seeking. For me, the journey has been as much about doing my own work of self-discovery as it has been about guiding leaders through their respective DEI journeys to inclusive leadership. Eventually I learned that my success was predicated on being able to draw on perspectives from multiple cultural contexts.

A Few Notes on Terminology

I use DEI as an acronym for diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout this book. I define *diversity* as a demographic mix of people, including those from marginalized or underrepresented groups; *equity* refers to eliminating systemic barriers that inhibit full participation and equal access to opportunities; and *inclusion* is the act of creating a work culture in which individuals can participate fully because systemic barriers have been removed. The outcome of an inclusive culture is one in which employees experience a sense

of belonging and their uniqueness is embraced.¹ The ultimate goal is to embed DEI at all levels within organizations and society to ensure social justice. I have found that being able to draw on various perspectives and act on them is what makes DEI successful. This starts even with the very words that we use to describe this work. I may use DEI, but leaders in disparate organizations and in different parts of the world use a range of words. For example, in parts of Europe, some organizations prefer to say “inclusion” and “non-discrimination” rather than “diversity” as these concepts resonate more. Others might add “belonging” and drop “equity” all together.

I have chosen to capitalize Black, White, and Brown. In writing this book, I constantly caught myself normalizing whiteness as a default and as a result not racializing White in the same way I was doing for Black. Following the lead of the National Association of Black Journalists and some Black scholars, I have decided to capitalize White. Eve Ewing, a Black sociologist at the University of Chicago wrote in an online essay, “When we ignore the specificity and significance of Whiteness. . . . we contribute to its seeming neutrality and thereby grant it power to maintain its invisibility.”²

Why This Book?

Why is this book different and why write it? In doing global transformation work, I yearned for a book that addressed the unique challenges of DEI change in a global organizational context. Although there are several academic books on global DEI, this book is a view from the trenches—a view from someone who has had to pioneer a way forward without any real map. I decided to write this book because in my DEI career I’ve learned some hard lessons. I want to give back what I’ve acquired from this work to you, leaders in global organizations who want your DEI efforts to matter, to stick, to last, and to make a difference.

Do any of these scenarios sound familiar?

- You come to the US on a business trip and are surprised by how openly US Americans talk about personal experiences with race. You are uneasy about inviting any US facilitators to your country to talk about DEI in case they don't understand the sensitivities in discussing race.
- Your women's employee resource group has been very successful in creating a sense of community and belonging for women, and you've tried to replicate this in other countries. But in some places, women don't seem to be interested and, at times, are even openly hostile to the idea.
- You can see that there are no Black managers in the office in Europe but are told that you cannot collect data on race.
- You give a presentation featuring the business case for DEI and you hear feedback that some people were offended that the company was trying to capitalize on diversity with no mention of it being the right thing to do.
- Your global CEO is very committed to advancing DEI, but several of the country executive teams are dismissive. They see no value-add to the business, and they believe DEI is a US fad.

I know many of you reading this book have experienced the same challenges of global DEI work as I have. Each time I speak at conferences and events, global DEI draws the most interest. And based on what I hear from the audience, it has caused the most frustration. Given repeated appeals for more guidance on global DEI, I knew that sharing my professional journey in DEI would help global change agents.

I've written this book for leaders and change agents in all types of multinational organizations, including for-profit, nonprofit, and the public sector. This book is for executives, line managers, human

resource professionals, and DEI practitioners. You will also find value in this book if you lead single-country organizations.

As I started writing, I realized that it was more important to readers to learn about the informative story behind the “how to”—the missteps and lessons I had learned. Because it’s the challenges that brought me the greatest insight, and ultimately, the most lasting change. Believe me, it was sometimes frustrating. But mostly, and ultimately, it has been an incredibly rewarding journey of learning and change. After all, DEI work is about how we disrupt our own worldviews in order to bring about transformation in others.

Throughout the book, I cite examples from a range of companies, drawing from over sixty interviews. I mention them not because they are necessarily exemplar, but because they have replicable, interesting practices at a point in time.

If we want our businesses, organizations, and society to become diverse, equitable, and inclusive, we need to embark on a journey of change—not solely for policy and systems, but for people, as well. Ultimately, transformation happens at the intersection of the personal and systemic, and it is work that is ongoing. DEI must be a personal and professional journey for each of us if we want to become part of the plotline for true, lasting change toward diverse, equitable, and inclusive organizations.

FOREWORD

MAJOR UPHEAVALS CAN LEAD to unexpected progress in the longer term. Crises give rise to drastic changes in ways of thinking and in behaviors that have the potential to spawn innovation and accelerate transformations. We have seen this historically. In 2020, for instance, the devastating consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and civil unrest in the face of racial inequality caused organizations the world over to take action: ad hoc appointments were made; commitments to policy changes were taken in order to address issues of social justice. These crises serve as a reminder that we must accelerate the pace of change in our workplace and communities and be bolder in our ambition to make them more diverse, equitable, and inclusive.

This raw urgency is a prerequisite for driving deep-seated change. Societal disruptions provide a unique opportunity to anchor diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) principles and practices as businesses reinvent themselves and assume greater responsibility for addressing societal inequities. But how do you bring about the kind of swift and thorough cultural transformation needed to truly shift mindsets, especially in multinational organizations that exist in locations with vastly different legal, cultural, and social norms? That's where Dr. Rohini Anand can guide us.

This comprehensive book speaks to the intricacies, complexities, and nuances of cultivating DEI in global organizations. As a leader of a company with 420,000 employees and operations in more than 60 countries, I have witnessed first-hand the essential value of a well-conceived and executed global inclusion change strategy that

fully delivers on its promise. It takes significant insight, personal experience, and commitment to truly get it right, and that is precisely what Rohini brings to the conversation. Most recently, she has served as the Senior Vice President Corporate Responsibility and Global Chief Diversity Officer at Sodexo, and she is recognized as a thought leader and subject matter expert who has supported many organizations in their inclusion change efforts.

Through engaging storytelling, Rohini lays out five key principles for building an effective global DEI strategy. She addresses everything from localizing efforts and aligning them to business goals, to the necessity of leadership transformation, establishing governance, and developing metrics and accountability. Rohini has the unique ability to speak both to the head and to the heart: in explaining each core principle, she leverages research, data, field experiences, best practices, and vivid anecdotes that bring the principles to life. She enriches her own experiences with insights from other global executives.

An inclusion journey requires organizations and their leaders to go through their own transformation. Rohini sets a clear example by candidly sharing her missteps and her own journey of introspection and awareness. Intentionally highlighting multiple perspectives, the book is packed with stories, lessons, and frameworks to guide change agents in the urgent work of advancing a diverse, equitable, and inclusive culture in their organizations.

Rohini is a bright, passionate, and inspiring leader who quite simply makes you want to follow her. Working closely with her has been an eye-opener, and her vision has spurred my own commitment on this crucial topic. Our relationship has helped me grow. And now, she pours her unique brand of insight, tenacity, resilience, and vision into a book that can guide you as you pursue the vital work of bringing about a more equitable workplace, business, community, and society.

FOREWORD

Regardless of where your corporation is on the journey, this must-read book will give you a solid foundation to achieve the vision of a truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization.

—Sophie Bellon
Chair
Sodexo's Board of Directors

INTRODUCTION

From Class Action to Best in Class: A Personal Journey

*To be aware of a single shortcoming within oneself is more useful
than to be aware of a thousand in somebody else.*

—THE DALAI LAMA

IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL SPRING DAY IN PARIS in 2007. We were sipping espressos and savoring the buttery croissants during a leadership meeting break at the *Palais des Congrès* in Porte Maillot. I stood at a high-top table, the only female among five white French male executives from Sodexo. I was excited. Building on the DEI success we had in the US, I had just stepped into a new role to establish and lead diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) globally.

We talked leisurely. The men chatted about their trips to India and how they loved travelling there. They knew I had just returned from a trip to India to visit my parents. They were knowledgeable and curious about India's foods, religions, and politics.

Despite the fact that I had lived in the US for close to thirty years by then, it was clear that they saw me as Indian and not US American. So, they were completely comfortable confiding in me their thoughts about their US colleagues. The "Americans," as they referred to them, focused on flashy presentations, while the French focused on substance. They were perplexed at how people

from the US were so politically correct and shied away from discussing politics. One asked me why they did not have challenging discussions during meetings. (Like so many around the world, they referred to “Americans.” They, like me before I started doing global work, weren’t aware that the use of this term to describe a US American can be offensive to some—particularly to people from other countries in the Americas.)

Looking for an entry point to bring up DEI, I tested the waters very gingerly by raising the importance of DEI to a global organization like Sodexo. After all, my new role as global chief diversity officer (CDO) was to ensure that we advanced DEI globally, and here I had a ready audience.

The easy banter stopped abruptly. Two executives walked away, ostensibly to smoke. Another executive went out of his way to explain how Sodexo was already diverse. Look at all the nationalities we employ across eighty countries, he pointed out.

Another executive declared that issues of race don’t exist in France. As evidence, he cited that some of his friends were married to French women of Algerian or Tunisian origin. When I challenged them about the lack of women in leadership, they promptly replied that women don’t want to take executive positions because of family obligations. Their response to the lack of Black French people in management ranks was that they did not see color. And when I very tentatively mentioned the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) population, the response was, “That’s a private matter that we don’t bring into the office.”

“Diversity is a very American thing, Rohini. It does not apply to us in Europe as we already have so many nationalities here,” concluded the first executive. As we walked back into the meeting, my head was spinning. I realized that as soon as I had engaged my colleagues on DEI, they saw me as an “American” and a barrier came up between us. They pushed back because they perceived that I was imposing a US construct on them.

Their reactions caught me off guard. We had made tremendous progress in advancing diversity in Sodexo US since I had joined as CDO for North America in 2002. I had reported to the global CEO, Michel Landel, and he had positioned DEI for success in the US.

These executives were comfortable navigating business globally and saw themselves as global citizens. Thanks to their candor, I was now becoming acutely aware of the challenge that lay ahead. I knew I had to help them to first recognize the challenges encountered by people who are marginalized, powerless, or underrepresented in the workplace. Then they needed to see the benefit of diversity to their teams. I was initially taken aback by how their perception of me had shifted so quickly in the conversation. But then, it was a reminder of my own identity-shifting journey to North America decades earlier.

A Personal Journey

On a sweltering, hot, and humid monsoon night, my entire family—parents, siblings, grandparents, a few cousins, and friends—had come to see me off at the airport in Mumbai. I was nervous and excited. Excited because I was finally going to graduate school in North America and nervous because it was my first trip on an airplane.

The farewell was a turmoil of hugs and kisses, tears and advice. “Make sure you eat well.” “Write often.” “Send pictures.” “Don’t get an American accent.” And from my grandfather: “I am looking forward to seeing you get your PhD.”

As I geared myself up for the long flight, I was bursting with anticipation for the next phase of my life. I was ready for this adventure but had no clue of what lay ahead. I recalled stories my father had shared. He had come to the United States as a young man and, throughout my childhood, had told me wonderful stories of the land that nineteenth century Chinese American pioneers had called “Gold Mountain” or the land of opportunity where fortunes

could be made. After completing his university studies and before returning to India, he had worked in Hollywood with the likes of Cary Grant. Not exactly the “typical” immigrant experience.

To provide some context, in the 1970s few single Indian women traveled to the United States to study. This was at a time when women in India generally completed their undergraduate degree as a qualification for a “good” arranged marriage. Yet, despite the prejudices he’d encountered in traveling through the southern US in the 1940s, my father encouraged and supported me to go to North America for my master’s degree. I’m glad he didn’t dwell on the negatives. He afforded me the opportunity to be open to my own journey.

The underlying expectation was that I would return to India as he had and “settle down.” But the aerograms from my grandfather, an academic, urged me to complete my studies and become financially independent. I often reflect on how life would have been different had I been swayed by the cultural assumptions of me as an Indian woman.

I grew up in Mumbai, India. Moving to North America was an inflection point in my life. Growing up in India, almost everyone looked like me. I belonged to the majority religion, Hinduism. Surrounded by others like me, I had the privilege of not having to think about my identity. I was acutely aware of class privilege, however, as I grew up in an upper middle-class home where we spoke English, and I went to an international school.

That was my identity before I flew to North America. In my own naïve way, I saw myself as a citizen of the world. But in the hours and days after I passed through customs, that fantasy gave way to another reality. My identity shifted from being a person who saw herself at the center of her world, part of the educated elite, to being a minority—an immigrant—and yes, a foreigner. And I was totally unprepared for that.

Yet, like millions of people before me, upon arriving in this new land, I took on a new identity. Or, more accurately, identities. My India-to-North America journey crystalized how I perceived myself, how others saw me, my response to their perceptions and, subsequently, how I reacted to the world around me. Even in transit to North America I had my first taste of this. As I waited in Heathrow airport for my connection, I was aware that the only other South Asians I saw were the women in colorful *salwar kameezes* cleaning the bathrooms. Would I be lumped together with them? In that flash, so many things came into focus—my skin color, my accent, the fear of diminishing my own class privilege, and more. It was a brand-new awareness of myself and others’ perceptions of me that took years to unpack and fully understand.

This multilayered, cross-cultural experience became the core of my graduate research and today is at the center of my work. The change to being identified as a minority made me realize the privileges that came with being part of a majority. I was part of the majority growing up in India and I had not recognized or reflected upon my privilege in that way. More importantly, I was unable to, until I was perceived as a minority and I experienced things differently. The realization that identity is situational and fluid still informs my work.

So, this vocation is very personal to me. And I’ve come to realize that the personal journey of understanding what it means to be perceived as a minority—an outsider—in disparate contexts is at the heart of DEI. It’s not abstract. It’s embedded in how people see themselves, others, and their world.

As I think about DEI and the way it impacts the world around us, there is no denying that diversity and inclusion—or, more commonly, the lack thereof—has been at the core of many societal and corporate missteps. DEI is inherently about change. And change doesn’t always come easily. It often comes with, or because of,

challenges. Change came to me because of challenges, and it was challenge that eventually made Sodexo a more inclusive company.

Beginning with Trust

Thirty minutes into my interview with Michel Landel, the Sodexo North America CEO in 2002, I knew that I wanted to work for a company he was leading. Sodexo's workforce presented an incredible opportunity for fostering a diverse and inclusive culture. It was a microcosm of society with multiple races and ethnicities represented, particularly in entry-level roles. I would be charged with establishing and executing a DEI strategy and positioning it in the business—initially in North America.

In my pre-interview research, I had learned that Sodexo had several private lawsuits pending, as well as charges issued by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the agency that investigates discrimination complaints in the US. "But what large company doesn't have some litigation they're addressing?" I thought, not realizing the seriousness of one of these lawsuits. In March 2001, African American managers had filed a promotion discrimination case against Sodexo Marriott Services, Inc., Sodexo's predecessor company.

The lawsuit was certified as a class action lawsuit in 2002, six months after I joined the company. And on August 10, 2005, the court approved a settlement agreement between the company and the plaintiffs. In addition to the US \$80 million monetary settlement for approximately 3,400 current and former African American managers, Sodexo agreed to continue to make enhancements to its systems, policies, and practices. These included equal employment opportunity (EEO) and diversity training, a new performance management process, a validated selection process and open postings for all positions, an office to investigate and resolve internal complaints of employment discrimination, and the establishment

of an independent panel of monitors to oversee the implementation of the nonmonetary provisions of the decree. The decree monitor panel was active until 2010. This was a difficult time for the company, and it was clear much work needed to be done in North America before Sodexo could take on any global challenges.

My First Steps: Listening and Learning

After joining the company, my first meeting was with senior African American leaders who had come together to form an employee resource group (ERG) to address the advancement of African Americans and to create a sense of community in the company. ERGs are formed by employees around like identities to address opportunities relevant to their identity group. This was my first official week at the company and I was to lead and present at the meeting. I was acutely aware of my Asian American identity in that room full of African American business leaders. I came to understand the important struggle that lay ahead—there I was, in 2002, an Asian American, very aware of the need to build trust with these leaders in the only way that I knew how: by being authentic and transparent.

Building Trust through Candid Conversations

In the US, issues of race have centered on Black and White, especially as we confront the systemic racism that infuses US history. So how did I fit into this narrative? Was I seen as a management spokesperson by the African American community in the organization? Despite being a fellow *person of color*—a term used in the US to refer to Asian American, Hispanic,¹ African American, Native American, and other people who are not classified as White—was I seen as someone who could not possibly understand the experiences of African Americans?

I began to question the company's judgement in hiring a non-African American, when there was so much at stake. While 13

percent of the US workforce is African American or Black, 26 percent of cases filed with the EEOC are for race discrimination against Black employees.² It was natural that organizations tended to appoint people of like identity for positions like mine; they are perceived as understanding the issues.

I had my share of experiences of being stereotyped, of being told to “go back to where you came from,” of being told with surprise that I spoke English well. I was also aware of the life experiences of my African American colleagues. But I had not lived their experiences of being marginalized and discriminated against within the potent historical context of enslavement in the US.

Building trust began with candid conversations; I acknowledged that I did not know but was willing to learn and to listen. It began with admitting that this was an extremely difficult time for the company and that, while we were not perfect, we were committed to trying. And it began with cultivating relationships and developing allies among my African American colleagues—allies who would give me candid feedback and coach me. These allies helped me keep my ear to the ground, alerting me if I needed to attend to situations. I know that I would not have been successful without the generosity of spirit of the Black employees at Sodexo and their willingness to trust me.

Tackling Resistance

Building relationships with African American employees and allowing space for sharing stories was a critical first step, but it was far from enough. I also had to build credibility with management and establish a reputation as someone who knew what she was doing and could deliver. I had to find a practical way to encourage the commitment needed to make the culture more diverse and inclusive, while aligning it with the realities of a low-margin business.

I was fortunate to work with a French CEO, Michel Landel, who had gone through his own journey to understand race in the US and who fundamentally believed that DEI was simply the right thing. I know this is not the case in many organizations. With his trust and sponsorship, we launched a multiyear strategy to address all internal systems and processes and to raise the awareness and competence of senior leaders.

Engaging a predominantly White male executive team and getting their buy-in was one of my first priorities. They had to overcome their view that DEI was simply a legal requirement and irrelevant to the business. They also had to be convinced that it was a way to attract and engage the best talent. And they had to see DEI as a market differentiator and an enabler of business success if we wanted a truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization as an outcome.

To get there, the executives had to take ownership of their own learning journeys. I had to influence these leaders, chipping away at their resistance, so that ultimately, they demonstrated their inclusive leadership. While a necessary first step, engaging the executive team alone was still not adequate to transform the culture to be more equitable and inclusive. We had to examine the systems and processes at each stage of the talent process in order to eliminate bias. This required partnering across the organization.

Embedding DEI in Company Systems

In 1998 Marriott International's foodservice division merged with the North America division of Sodexo (then Sodexho) to form Sodexo Marriott Services. In 2001, Sodexo acquired all of the share capital of Sodexo Marriott Services, growing exponentially from a smaller regional player to a leader in the food and facilities industry in North America.

The rapid growth and decentralized nature of the business meant there were few consistent practices; the priority during the merger months had been on establishing basic procedures to get people paid and ensuring they had their benefits. This transition presented an opportunity for the legal, human resources, and DEI teams to collaborate on developing consistent systems and policies to eliminate any possibilities of bias in the talent lifecycle.

Our approach was to ensure that DEI was not an isolated program or initiative disconnected from the business. In order to eliminate any bias in the employee lifecycle, DEI had to be integrated into all talent processes and policies from recruitment to development, promotion, retention, and succession planning. A diversity scorecard held leaders accountable for being inclusive.

A critical step in the inclusion journey was launching, what we later called at Sodexo, the employee business resource groups (EBRGs). In other organizations they are called employee resource groups (ERGs). The African American Leadership Forum (AALF), formed in 2002, was the first EBRG and was followed by several others. Contrary to the early resistance premised on the perception that the EBRGs would create silos and become “gripe” sessions, these groups provided a sense of community and belonging, and they seeded the organization with local DEI champions. Regular internal surveys revealed that EBRGs were considered an important investment by the company. They were credited with being a key reason that talent stayed with Sodexo and were a driver of employee engagement.

With investment and an immense amount of work, by 2010, the company had seen tremendous benefits from DEI both to its culture and to the business. Leadership became visibly more diverse, with women and people of color leading large and profitable segments of the business, and the culture became more inclusive as evidenced in survey results. Women and people of color had increased access to job opportunities and more rewarding

careers. Surveys showed that they felt included and committed to the organization. Kenneth Johnson, an African American AALF leader said, “This was an exciting time in our company! I saw leaders like myself in executive positions and in the C-suite. We talked openly and constructively about difference as part of our self-discovery. We were engaged and we felt a sense of belonging to the company!”³

With these advances, Sodexo gained stature as a thought leader in DEI. Sodexo’s leadership, who had previously considered DEI merely a legal requirement, now saw it as an asset to the company. The legal requirements became an irrelevant threshold that the company far exceeded as they realized the benefits. When the consent decree monitoring committee expired in 2010, the leadership decided to appoint an external DEI advisory board for several years after to ensure Sodexo continued to remain intentional in addressing DEI and had an external perspective to inform that commitment.

The Power of Clients and the Community

As with any business, customers and clients are integral to the external ecosystem. Initially, I was intimidated by Sodexo’s size and decentralized nature, which I assumed would make it challenging to establish a foundation for cultural transformation. How do you create an inclusive culture when 97 percent of your employees physically work at client locations like schools, universities, and hospitals and often identify with and assimilate to that culture? How do you foster a sense of belonging to Sodexo? How do you ensure that the client has the same values around DEI as you do?

Rather than being an inhibitor, this client connection became an enabler that fast-tracked the DEI engagement of middle managers, who are usually a barrier in most organizations. As Sodexo started

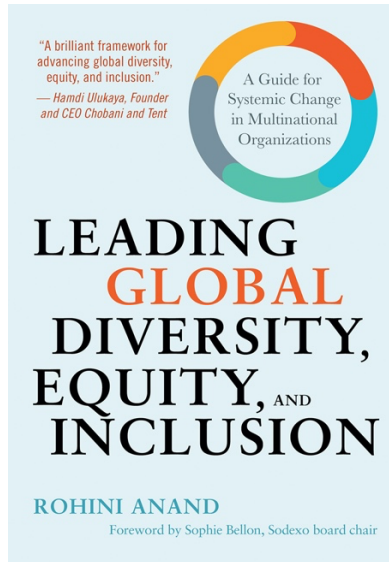
being seen as a leader in DEI, clients began to ask Sodexo for assistance with their DEI efforts. Seeing their clients seeking out Sodexo's help created a sense of pride in the mostly White, male, mid-level managers. It engaged them in DEI, and they chose to diversify their teams, participate in the client's DEI councils, share best practices from Sodexo, and help clients with their own DEI efforts. As Sodexo leaders became more aware of the benefits to client relationships and to the business, the support for DEI deepened.

What had changed to catch clients' attention? Not only was the top management and leadership more visibly diverse, but clients noticed the positive impact on the service to their diverse customers—a result of training and mentoring initiatives. Sodexo became more visibly active in communities of color, partnering with clients to improve the quality of life in these communities. Prestigious organizations like Catalyst, a renowned global nonprofit that accelerates women into leadership, and DiversityInc, a US organization that ranks the top companies for diversity based on a survey, recognized Sodexo's cultural transformation with multiple awards.

With this recognition, not only did DEI make good business sense, it had become an integral component of Sodexo's brand promise, driving differentiation and competitive advantage. Sodexo's leaders saw that addressing equity and inclusion for its employees was compatible with business growth as clients and prospects were drawn to the brand because of the DEI actions Sodexo had taken. The DEI reputation enhanced Sodexo's overall image and Sodexo was increasingly perceived as a strategic partner.

I have always been acutely aware that organizations have to focus on truly making their cultures diverse, equitable, and inclusive before they can share their work externally in a way that is authentic. Although organizations can go from class action to best in class, without intentionality and focus, it is easy to slide back. Addressing DEI is continual and relentless.

**We hope that you enjoyed this excerpt from
Leading Global Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
by Rohini Anand.**



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