

Culture and Talent

An Interview with Diane Adams,
Chief Culture and Talent Officer, McGraw-Hill Education

EDITORS' NOTE In 2016, Diane Adams joined McGraw-Hill Education as its Chief Human Resources Officer. Adams had most recently served as Chief People Officer at Qlik Technologies. Prior to joining Qlik, she served as Executive Vice President, Culture and Talent, at Allscripts. Previously, she served in a variety of human resources leadership positions at Cisco Systems over a 14-year span. Adams holds a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



Diane Adams

COMPANY BRIEF McGraw-Hill Education (mbeducation.com) is a learning science company that delivers personalized learning experiences that help students, parents, educators, and professionals drive results. McGraw-Hill Education has offices across North America, India, China, Europe, the Middle East and South America, and makes its learning solutions available in nearly 60 languages.

Are culture and talent interrelated?

They truly are. I renamed the function from human resources to culture and talent because it allows my own team to be clear on what our priorities are and what our focus is. What's also great is that it sends a strong message to the entire company regarding what we're all about. It shows that we care that we have a great culture to work in and that we care about having great talent. If we get the culture and talent right, the company is going to thrive.

Recently, we've clearly defined our core values for McGraw-Hill Education. We're transitioning from being a print company to being a digital company, so we need to be really clear about our values and behaviors in order for us to be successful as we move further into the digital space.

How important is it to engage the employees internally and ensure they understand the transformation?

We hold listening forums to help address this. We hold meetings with 12 to 15 people and ask them what is going well that we want to continue. However, we spend most of our time discussing what we need to do differently or at an accelerated rate to further our success and create a culture where they and the business thrive.

To your point, the listening forums are core to making sure we have employee input and that they're playing a key role.

We also hold town hall meetings and conduct surveys afterwards. We get a lot of feedback, not only about how the town hall went, but what they want to see more of and see done differently.

These are a few ways to ensure that they're playing an ownership role in the company.

How has the HR function evolved?

The best HR teams lead with data, so from a business perspective, just like in any other function, we measure everything. That data goes to the executive team so we see where we're doing well and where we need to make changes.

This is one of the shifts I've seen from an HR perspective. Relationships are still key, but it's about understanding the influences and the business and leading with data.

Another transition is moving from transactions to a focus on the outcome that is desired. We need to be clear about the experiences we want our team members to have.

I like to have a diverse team with a wide range of experiences. Today, we're eager to bring in people with varied experiences who have passion and who appreciate our culture.

Does hiring the best talent ensure that you are attracting a diverse workforce?

If I view the best teams as diverse ones, then that is how I'm going to hire. We're also beyond race and gender right now. Instead, it's always looking at the existing team and thinking about what we need to complement it to create a diverse makeup.

We're currently rolling out a program where everyone in the company will participate in a strength-finder assessment, which determines each person's top five strengths. Research shows that the most successful people play to their strengths. We want people to leverage their strengths so it serves them best. This is how we take the McGraw-Hill team members to another level.

Is the industry where it needs to be when it comes to opportunities for women and how can this be furthered?

It's about what we can do within our own companies to get better, and we do have a focus on this. More than half of our employees are women. When it comes to looking at data, we need to be very intentional with the roles we have open.

Our customers are clearly very diverse so, from a race and gender perspective, we want to ensure that our organization also reflects this to be at our best.

We are very intentional with our placements. We want the makeup of our workforce to represent our customers, and we know that is going to result in the greatest success for us.

How does diversity relate to inclusion?

Inclusion is the step beyond diversity. Inclusion is about belonging. In our cultural aspiration statement, we talk about how we want everyone here to reach their full potential personally and professionally, and we also want that in a diverse and inclusive environment.

We have a cross-functional team right now looking at this. Regardless of anyone's experiences or backgrounds, we want everyone to be embraced for their unique selves.

Is the message well understood about the McGraw-Hill Education of today?

We're working now on simple things, like our website, which is much more indicative of who we are today. This is truly a company that is transforming. It is also a cool place to work and will be a place where everyone can be at their best, personally and professionally.

Also, everyone here is very clear on what our mission and vision are, and they know what we're building. Our team members are very excited about being part of this transition.

I worried initially that because we're 129 years old, we would be resistant to change, and what I'm thrilled about is that people love the mission, they love being involved in the creation of where we're headed, and they love that we're very clear about where we're headed.

How critical is it to have the commitment from your leadership team to these efforts?

It's critical that our CEO embraces our values. We all know about the companies that talk about doing that but don't. Everyone on our senior leadership team is very committed to our values. ●