

Adding Value to the Business

**An Interview with Karleen Mussman,
Chief Human Resources Officer, Baker Tilly**

EDITORS' NOTE *Karleen Mussman is the chief human resources officer at Baker Tilly Virchow Krause, LLP. Mussman provides forward-thinking leadership to guide the firm's people strategy and position Baker Tilly as an employer-of-choice. Mussman has more than 25 years of experience creating and executing global talent strategies.*



Karleen Mussman

FIRM BRIEF *Baker Tilly Virchow Krause, LLP (bakertilly.com) is a nationally recognized, full-service accounting and advisory firm whose specialized professionals connect with clients and their businesses through candor and clear industry insight. With approximately 2,700 employees across the United States, Baker Tilly is one of the 15 largest accounting and advisory firms in the country. Headquartered in Chicago, Baker Tilly is an independent member of Baker Tilly International, a worldwide network of independent accounting and business advisory firms in 147 territories, with 33,600 professionals.*

Will you discuss how the Chief Human Resources Officer role has evolved?

The role of the CHRO has evolved over the last decade and so has the approach to leading a human resources function. While much has changed, I have always come to the table with both a business and an HR point of view. First, it is table stakes to understand your business - the facts, figures, data, clients, industry trends, culture and strategy before you can begin applying people-related solutions. I make it a daily practice to be curious and seek to understand our clients and our industry more broadly, as well as think about things like the workforce of the future and specific people-related topics. I also believe that a capable CHRO can demonstrate the ROI that a strong talent strategy brings to an organization. Things like culture, engagement, turnover, retention, hiring, labor costs, benefits and rewards are business metrics that can and should be used to make sound decisions the same way other metrics are used. The CHRO role today encompasses strategy, growth, talent management and development, diversity and inclusion, organizational performance and engagement, which together have tremendous financial and other positive impacts on an organization.

How critical is culture for Baker Tilly and how important is it to look for cultural fit during the hiring process?

Certainly in the accounting and advisory profession, technical skills and business acumen are essential. We don't just look for candidates to fit in - we look for candidates who will stand out.

Our core values infuse our culture. A firm needs to credibly live its values in order to make a genuine difference in the entire career life cycle - from recruiting to retirement. At Baker Tilly, we like to expose a candidate to our culture as much as possible - ensuring that every interview and touch point provides insight. By the time a candidate completes our recruiting process, they really know our firm - things about us you can't know from the outside that show the essence of our culture. That's what leads to our high acceptance rate for new hires.

Diversity, inclusion and belonging is who we are rather than simply what we do.

We take pride in cultivating a diverse, engaging and inclusive culture where exceptional people thrive - it's something we work on every day.

What is the value of diversity and inclusion to Baker Tilly's business?

Diversity, inclusion and belonging enables companies to maximize the unique insights of each team member. We know that a greater sense of belonging leads to more engagement, less absenteeism, less turnover, higher productivity - and in our case, an even more committed workforce.

Diversity of thought, background, perspective and experiences make us less prone to "groupthink" and better at attracting and retaining talent. Inclusion is being valued, respected and supported in a workplace where every team member can achieve her or his full potential.

Would you highlight Baker Tilly's approach to diversity and inclusion?

Diversity, inclusion and belonging is who we are rather than simply what we do. We take a holistic approach by embedding the philosophy and practices of diversity, inclusion and belonging into all aspects of our business. We do this to create a sense of belonging for all team members. We do this to foster a cultural mindset and effect change. We view diversity, inclusion and belonging as a lens that makes everything better. We measure this like we do any other aspect of our business performance. While we focus on talent first - we also value diverse experiences and the potential in all candidates.

In leading the HR function, how critical is it to track employee engagement?

Many companies have surveys. We really take ours to heart. Our scores are higher than the average for professional services firms and they get better every year. However, it's more than just a number that counts. The real value of our team member engagement survey lies in the richness of thousands of comments that provide a virtual window into areas of interest and recommendations on change or improvement. This gives us a great start to open dialogue and take action on the things that matter most to our team members. Many of the programs and initiatives we have come directly from feedback and suggestions from our team members.

Listening to our team members, putting their feedback into action and then communicating the improvements we make because of their input is essential to team member engagement. ●