

# LEADERS

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# A Business Imperative

An Interview with Susan L. Johnson,  
Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, The Hartford

**EDITORS' NOTE** Susan Johnson assumed her current post in 2013. Prior to joining The Hartford, Johnson was Vice President of Executive Succession and Diversity Strategies at Pitney Bowes. She has held a variety of human resource management positions at Pepsi-Cola and Campbell Soup Company. Johnson's experience also includes participation in local, state and national political campaigns, as well as work on domestic policy and management issues in the public sector. She is a graduate of Spelman College and received a master's degree in industrial and labor relations from Cornell University.



Susan L. Johnson

**COMPANY BRIEF** With more than 200 years of expertise, The Hartford ([thehartford.com](http://thehartford.com)) is a leader in property and casualty insurance, group benefits and mutual funds. The company is widely recognized for its service excellence, sustainability practices, trust and integrity.

## How do you define the role of a Chief Diversity Officer and how do you focus your efforts at The Hartford?

As Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, I focus on educating employees about the importance of maintaining a diverse and inclusive work environment and empowering them to be catalysts for change. At The Hartford, we believe that people should be respected for who they are, recognized for how they contribute and empowered to engage on complex societal topics that affect them at work. Key to fostering this culture is continuing to raise awareness of evolving social issues affecting employees inside and outside the company and engaging in meaningful discussions bridging employees' experiences with our company's core values and beliefs.

## Will you provide an overview of The Hartford's diversity and inclusion strategy?

We are maintaining a diverse and inclusive culture at The Hartford as a business imperative and a critical part of the company achieving its business goals. We strive to cultivate a diverse workforce that mirrors our customers, partners and communities to be relevant and relatable to all our stakeholders, and to continue to attract top talent to our organization. To accomplish this, our strategy focuses on helping employees appreciate differences, value inclusion and share their experiences by providing them with education, training and engagement opportunities.

## How ingrained is diversity and inclusion in The Hartford's culture and values?

Our commitment to diversity and inclusion (D&I) is deeply rooted in The Hartford's culture. We have a long-held belief that sustaining an inclusive culture provides an environment where all employees can focus on business outcomes, enabling more innovative ideas and better solutions for our customers. We value the diversity of our employees' skills and life experiences and invest deeply in their development.

Throughout all levels, we provide education and training on appreciating differences and managing inclusion, as well as providing opportunities for engagement.

## How do you engage your employees in The Hartford's diversity efforts?

The Hartford wants employees to bring all the elements of who they are to work – their backgrounds, cultures, experiences, passions and interests. One way we engage our employees and further our inclusive culture is through courageous conversations. These conversations are the result of employees wanting to have an open dialogue on topics that are important to them. Our training enables the appropriate atmosphere to discuss these matters internally. Through formal and organic dialogue, the goal is to respectfully exchange perspectives so that employees feel empowered to have them, and evolve from their discussions.

Another way we engage is through our nine Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), which provide employees the opportunity to be more connected while helping to support our business success. ERGs are initiated by employees within The Hartford who may represent a particular constituency and serve as a resource for both group members and the organization. Through these groups, employees have the opportunity to bring their unique perspectives to influence business plans and outcomes. ERGs also provide engagement opportunities for its members that help build their personal lives and professional careers.

## Is it critical to have metrics in place to track the impact of The Hartford's diversity and inclusion efforts?

In our 2017 employee survey, 88 percent of employees said The Hartford made it easy for people with diverse backgrounds to feel accepted. We believe metrics are an essential part of measuring the impact and progress of our D&I strategy.

By using data to understand how employees feel about our culture, we can continue to evolve as an organization to meet the needs of our workforce. In addition, we use external benchmarking to understand how we compare in the marketplace. In the past year, we have received the following awards and recognitions: Bloomberg Gender Equality Index for the third consecutive year, Best Places to Work for LGBTQ Equality by Human Rights Campaign Foundation for the 10th year, Best Place to Work by Disability Equality Index, and 2020 Women on Boards Winning "W" Company.

## How broadly do you define diversity at The Hartford?

At The Hartford, we define diversity as who the person is and what they bring to their role. As for inclusion, we view it as the act of demonstrating behaviors that value and leverage the diversity in each employee. You can think of it as diversity being who is on the team and inclusion being who gets to play. When everyone feels valued for their uniqueness and has the opportunity to perform at their full potential, we recognize it as an inclusive work environment.

## How critical is it to have the commitment of the board and senior management in your diversity and inclusion efforts?

Creating a culture of diversity and inclusion begins at the leadership level. Our Chairman and CEO, Christopher Swift, is an advocate for the value and necessity of a diverse and inclusive workplace. He actively engages with employees on D&I topics and has shared his perspectives in many ways including internal blog posts about standing up against bigotry and hatred following news events such as the racial protests in Charlottesville and Charlotte, and the Pulse nightclub shooting. In addition, our senior management team participates in mentorship and sponsorship programs, and every ERG has an executive sponsor to assist in the execution of programs and strategy.

## What are your key priorities as you look to The Hartford's continued efforts in regard to diversity and inclusion?

Moving forward, our goal is to maintain diversity on our board, create a leadership pipeline for attracting and retaining diverse talent, and be the insurance industry leader in diversity and inclusion. We are pleased with our efforts to date, however, this is an ongoing long-term priority requiring continuous improvement to appropriately reflect the needs of our workforce, customers and communities. ●