

A Strong Sense of Community

An Interview with Anne Benedict, Chief Human Resources Officer,
and Diana Solash, Vice President, Global Head of Inclusion, Talent and Community, Infor

EDITORS' NOTE Anne Benedict runs Infor's global human resources. She came to Infor from IPG Mediabrands, the media assets division of Interpublic Group, one of the big four global media agency conglomerates. At IPG Mediabrands, she was responsible for the HR needs of the company's more than 8,500 employees in over 130 countries, including talent management, training, leadership/management development, organizational development, employee engagement, succession planning, and executive coaching. Benedict earned a B.S. degree in psychology and management magna cum laude from McGill University and a M.A.S.C. in industrial and organizational psychology from the University of Waterloo.

Diana Solash works with the entire Infor organization to ensure the diversity each person brings to the company is fully valued. She leads efforts to equip employees with skills and resources to work and lead inclusively by embedding I&D into the processes that impact the careers and sense of belonging of all Inforians, and by finding opportunities for the company to engage in external partnerships. Before joining Infor, Solash spent more than 20 years at EY, where she most recently was Director, Global Diversity & Inclusiveness. There, she led several critical initiatives such as the development of EY's global I&D strategy and U.S. & Canada ethnic minority strategy. She has been involved with several community organizations, including Ascend and CED's Women's Economic Empowerment subcommittee. Solash graduated cum laude from the University of Pennsylvania with a bachelor's degree in economics and psychology.

COMPANY BRIEF Infor (infor.com) is a global leader in business cloud software products for companies in industry specific markets. Infor builds complete industry suites in the cloud and efficiently deploys technology that puts the user experience first, leverages data science, and integrates easily into existing systems. Over 68,000 organizations in 170 countries worldwide rely on Infor's more than 17,000 employees to help overcome market disruptions and achieve business-wide digital transformation.

Will you highlight Infor's focus and commitment to social impact and corporate citizenship?

Benedict: When I joined Infor about three years ago, I felt that a sense of duty to give back



Anne Benedict



Diana Solash

to the community was part of the DNA of this organization. It was almost never an explicit mission that people talked about. It was just something that our people inherently were doing. We've always had a really strong sense of community which has become one of our core values that we rally around. It has been a part of our DNA as long as this company has existed and long before CSR was even an acronym.

People at Infor have always been "doing good" for the communities in which they live. We are just taking it to another level today by being more conscious, targeted and thoughtful about where we want to focus those efforts, but

it's really always been part of our legacy and our history. I think you can see that through the involvement of the people we have around the world who are our community engagement ambassadors who have taken it upon themselves with no extrinsic reward to help us advance this part of our culture.

Solash: I've been here for a year and a half. One of the first things that I was asked to do was to help put intention and formality around our volunteer efforts that were already happening on the ground. We called our various locations to ask who wanted to step forward and be part of a global work group to define our strategy. The reaction was incredible.

We had people from Hyderabad, Colombo, Manila, Paris, Munich, Barneveld, New York City and St. Paul sharing what they were doing on the ground and their views on how we could tie these activities together into a cohesive global strategy to amplify our collective efforts.

It's really important that we respect the desire our people have to be engaged in causes that are most meaningful in their local communities. We've developed a global strategy that provides overarching focus areas and guidelines and provides flexibility for our local offices to keep a local flair.

■

We've always had a really strong sense of community which has become one of our core values that we rally around. It has been a part of our DNA as long as this company has existed and long before CSR was even an acronym.

-Anne Benedict

■

■

To foster this inclusion and diversity, a key element of our community engagement strategy is equitable access to education and to STEM education, in particular.

-Diana Solash

■

How does Infor decide on the areas to support?

Benedict: We recognize that there are people who are involved in their local communities with local organizations addressing their specific local needs. We feel like we need to be there as a company and foster the employees' passion around this. The events we support run the gamut from helping build a school to doing a coat drive in a cold city like New York or doing a Christmas gift drive in Minnesota. Those types of events maintain that local flavor and we encourage those kinds of events. We look at these as local community partnerships.

Then, we have activities that are more globally connected causes that we are trying to push forward as a company. These tend to be around education and specifically STEM education. We're working with a couple of organizations which we view as "signature STEM partnerships" on a global level and then we're getting our local offices engaged to advance those causes together as a company globally.

STEM education supports our interest as a company in building a sustainable workforce for the future of the tech industry and for companies like us. We try to find a balance between local causes and our global commitment.

How critical is it to engage Infor's employees in these efforts?

Solash: We absolutely engage our colleagues in the local offices to ask, "What should our focus areas be?" This includes developing future talent for STEM, helping people in need and helping communities through disasters.

Our group of 40 or so community engagement ambassadors are very vocal about how we can better engage our colleagues around the world so we put together a community engagement website for our employees. This provides a way for us to list the volunteer opportunities that are available by region and by city. Many of our folks are either virtual employees or they travel a lot. Someone who lives in California can

visit the site and find activities whether they are going to be traveling to St. Paul or Hyderabad or Colombo.

Another area our direction committee raised was the issue of time off for volunteers. Many of the volunteer activities happen during the workday or during work hours so they were eager to have a formal time off policy for volunteerism. We actually instituted this time off policy this fiscal year based on the feedback of our people. We have received really good feedback from folks saying how much they appreciate that we listened to what they need to be able to engage in the community and people are using their eight hours per year in large numbers.

How important is it to have such a deep engagement and commitment from Infor's CEO and management team in supporting this type of work?

Benedict: This is really near and dear to Kevin Samuelson's (CEO of Infor) heart. If it wasn't, I don't think the effort would feel as authentic to our employees as it does. He is really engaged with this whole program and has very specific views about how we want to talk about it internally and externally. It's all about the organization's mission and us being able to help them with their mission versus making this all about us. Kevin has a very selfless kind of approach to our strategy towards all of this.

We recently opened a new office in Hyderabad and we also built a school there about a three-hour drive from our office. A group of eight of our executives, including Kevin, spent a day of service there together and shared it with the organization. Kevin's support for this program is very authentic and he's demonstrating this by rolling up his sleeves and getting involved personally.

How critical is it for leading companies to be purpose-driven in order to attract top talent?

Benedict: From an employment perspective, you not only have to be able to talk about why you exist and what your purpose is as a

company, but you have to live it too. This is what we try to do and it is super important in attracting the younger generations to our workforce. They all want to feel like they're working for a company that's making a difference in the world.

The other reason for doing these programs, and one of the criteria for the types of events that we do, is to bring teams together in a context that's outside of the office. Spending a day together in service to the community really helps to bridge the silos of different functions and brings our people closer together and helps to get them to know each other personally and build friendships. All of this creates a more engaged culture for people working here.

How important is it that Infor's workforce mirrors the diversity of its clients and will you discuss the emphasis Infor has placed around inclusion and diversity?

Solash: We definitely focus on inclusion and diversity and we put inclusion first. By inclusion we mean creating an environment where every one of our colleagues feels safe, trusted and valued for our unique perspectives, identities and backgrounds. Then we talk about diversity being all differences, including the ones that we typically think of such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and veteran status, and other less visible differences such as the country you are from or the languages that you speak. Research shows that when organizations have all those kinds of differences in the workforce, and when they actually value and include those differences, they are more likely to be able to solve customers' problems which are increasingly complex, increasingly global in nature and require people to see things from different angles.

To foster this inclusion and diversity, a key element of our community engagement strategy is equitable access to education and to STEM education, in particular. We know that there are groups that are underrepresented in those fields in many places, whether that's women across the globe or Black, Latinx and Native American Indians who are underrepresented in the U.S. We partner with organizations like the Posse Foundation and FIRST robotics. These are organizations that open the eyes of individuals who may not have family members or friends who are in the tech space.

As senior women executives, what do you tell young women about a career in tech and the opportunities for women in the industry?

Benedict: My advice to young girls is that the world is your oyster. You can do anything you want to do. Don't fall for the stereotypes. You've got the talent. We need to lift each other up as women and I think eventually there will be parity and we should all aspire to that. The obstacles are only as real as you allow them to be. Step forward and take your place in a meeting room or an organization. Raise your hand, be vocal, and act as if there's no bias and maybe someday there won't be any.

Solash: I tell them to take risks and to find your she heroes, which I call "sheroes." This gives you a crew of people to go through your experience with so you can say, "Hey, here's what I'm struggling with. Here's what my successes are." It helps to have people to talk to, listen to, and share strategies for success. ●