

A Force for Good

An Interview with Tami Erwin, CEO, Verizon Business

EDITORS' NOTE Tami Erwin is widely recognized for her strategic impact, marketing and operations focus, technical savvy and passion for people. Prior to being named CEO of Verizon Business Group, she played a crucial role in the evolution and growth of Verizon's wireline and wireless business segments. She was the head of operations for Verizon Wireless, and led Verizon Fios, the nation's largest residential and commercial



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fiber network. Earlier in her career, she was Chief Marketing Officer of Verizon Wireless. Erwin leads by example in advocating for women, social fairness and equal opportunity. She was the executive sponsor of Women of Wireless, the employee development program that, due to its success, broadened into the global Women of the World initiative. As the executive sponsor of Verizon's Veterans employee resource group, she provides strategic oversight of the programs and resources the company provides to its more than 10,000 veterans, active reservists and military families. She is also active in Verizon's Leadership Excellence Advancement Program and serves on the Paley Media Center Board of Trustees and the board of the Verizon Foundation. In addition, she served as the vice chairman of Chrysalis in Phoenix and vice chair of CommNexus in San Diego. Erwin is a graduate of the Executive Program at the Stanford University Graduate School of Business, and attended Pacific Union College, majoring in business administration.

COMPANY BRIEF Verizon (verizon.com) was formed on June 30, 2000 and is celebrating its 20th year as one of the world's leading providers of technology, communications, information and entertainment products and services. Headquartered in New York City and with a presence around the world, Verizon generated revenues of \$131.9 billion in 2019. The company offers voice, data and video services and solutions on its award winning networks and platforms, delivering on customers' demand for mobility, reliable network connectivity, security and control.

What have been the keys to Verizon Business' strength and leadership in the industry and how do you define the Verizon Business advantage?

We're at a pivotal moment in time where every large enterprise is reimagining the way they do business. As we look at the current environment, Verizon Business customers across all sectors – big and small – have accelerated their digital transformation runways from years to months. What this says to me is that there's never been a more critical time for

creating the 21st century infrastructure that will shape our future. For example, consider global enterprise, where we're working with our partners on IT infrastructures to enable employee work-from-home strategies, new supply chain models and end customer interactions like touchless retail. For public sector, we're enabling distance learning by providing connectivity and devices for under-resourced students, and for the lifeblood of our communities, small business, we're offering customized and scalable solutions that will allow them to launch digital front-doors as many retail locations close.

The speed of technological change will continue to accelerate, and Verizon Business is here to help our global customers stay ahead of it.

Will you highlight Verizon Business' solutions and offerings for businesses worldwide?

Verizon Business delivers mission critical connectivity, solutions and services that help businesses, governments and communities connect to and compete in the global economy, including 99 percent of Fortune 500 companies around the world in 150 countries and across six continents. What I'd say is most important about our work today is how we've helped our customers respond and react to the health and economic crisis at hand, and how we continue to partner with them to rebound and reimagine their futures. Just think about how events over the last several months have rapidly accelerated the shift to telehealth, remote learning and, especially, remote working. Companies are reimagining employee safety and training, rethinking security, and innovating the supply chain all the way from manufacturing and distribution to the point of purchase and delivery.

We're proud to be a global leader in 4G and 5G wireless and fixed wireless technology, private networks, mobile edge computing and emerging applications and solutions that will change everything about the way we do business.

How has Verizon Business adapted its business to address the pandemic in order to continue to effectively serve its employees, customers and communities during this unprecedented time?

At Verizon, we're committed to serving our four stakeholders – customers, employees, shareholders and society. We understand the influence we can have on these groups and the responsibility it entails. We've helped these constituents react to the global crisis, respond with an action plan and now reimagine the way forward as we develop the new normal.

As CEO of Verizon Business, our business continuity and disaster recovery operations started in January as the COVID outbreak began in APAC. We had a front row seat to how it moved around the globe through EMEA until it landed here in the United States. When the pandemic hit, we immediately operationalized our work from home model and began utilizing our resources and reach for good.

Employees and Customers: The safety and wellbeing of our employees has and always will be our number one priority. At the start of the stay-at-home orders, we helped move over 100,000 of Verizon's employees to remote work in 5 days, while never skipping a beat for customers. Verizon Business continued to provide connectivity and services to aid small business, large enterprise, distance learning, front line healthcare workers and first responders, among others.

Society: I'm also proud to have led and been a part of multiple initiatives across Verizon Business to benefit small businesses, women, front line workers and first responders. At Verizon Business, we've been focused on how we can help small businesses survive and thrive with a Comeback Coach program that provides free resources and mentorship to small business owners. Early on, we were able to connect 7 small business restaurants with front line healthcare workers and EMS in New York City, serving 80,000 meals to these healthcare heroes and keeping them in business through a program called Feeding the Frontlines. We also launched a broader "Pay

It Forward” program for small businesses that resulted in \$7.5 million in grants being given to small businesses around the U.S.

Another key area for me is women in business. We know that the pandemic has had, and continues to have, a disproportionate strain on women today. In July, we launched Verizon’s Women in Business Initiative to help women-owned small businesses run during the pandemic, after finding that 49 percent of women-owned small businesses wanted to have access to a network of like-minded female business leaders to navigate a post COVID-19 reality.

How critical is innovation for Verizon Business and where is innovation taking place within the business?

Innovation is no longer a nice to have, it’s a must have. At Verizon Business, innovation is both a driver of our work and the gold standard that we deliver to our customers. We provide enterprises around the world with transformative technology that will drive their digital transformation, innovation and accelerated growth in the 5G era. What is most exciting is that in just a short period of time we’ve been able to take 5G use cases from PowerPoint to proof-of-concept, and now commercial availability to scalability. The future is right here and right now – it’s a very exciting time.

How important is it for Verizon Business to build a diverse and inclusive workforce and to bring different experiences and perspectives to the table when making business decisions?

Diversity and inclusion efforts are at the heart of Verizon. It’s important that we continue to broaden our definition of D&I to ensure we’re building an organization that is rich with diverse POVs and skills. We recognize that diversity and inclusion isn’t just an HR issue – it’s an economic and leadership issue.

Personally, there are three cohorts I champion: women, veterans, and people with developmental disabilities. Supporting women in tech is probably a given for me, but veterans and people with intellectual and development disabilities may not be as obvious.

Veterans come to Verizon with inherent leadership qualities backed by solid skill sets and experiences that any employer would love. I’m proud to lead VALOR of Verizon (Veterans and Advocates Leading the Organization Responsibly), one of nine employee resource groups designed to promote inclusion while celebrating diversity. We employ more than 10,000 veterans, active reservists and military families.

Our employees with intellectual and developmental disabilities are looking for a chance to have a purpose and to belong – they bring such energy, focus and passion to their work.

There’s never been a more critical time for corporations to show up and create environments that are inclusive and accessible to all. We recently launched Citizen Verizon, a new, all-encompassing responsible business plan for economic, environmental and social advancement that stretches beyond our walls. The plan includes heavy emphasis on inclusion efforts around expanding digital access, especially for

underserved communities, and further extends Verizon’s long-standing history of bridging the digital divide through our Verizon Innovative Learning program. Since 2012, the program has helped to close the digital divide by providing 450,000 students across the country with connectivity, technology and an immersive STEM curriculum, investing over \$535 million in market value towards STEM education.

Beyond our education efforts, I’d be remiss if we didn’t discuss what is happening around the world in regards to racial and social injustice. For years, we’ve had moments in time where as a broader society we stop and listen to stories of systemic inequities, conscious bias and unconscious bias, but that’s not enough. I believe we have the responsibility to take this moment and make it a movement – one where we not only listen, but we learn and lead by action.

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Do you feel that there are strong opportunities for women at senior levels in the industry and what do you tell young women about building a career in the industry?

Thank you for asking this question, and bringing light to women in business, because it is important. I don’t think we can talk about women building a career in the industry without discussing it in the context of the current pandemic, acknowledging the disproportionate impact the pandemic is having on working women – one that risks unraveling decades of hard-earned progress for women and girls. We saw 865,000 women drop out of the U.S. workforce between August and September of last year, four times the rate of men. Since February, close to 5.8 million women have stepped away from their jobs and for the first time in six years, women are downshifting their careers faster than men.

I recently wrote a letter with Christy Pambianchi, our CHRO, and Rima Qureshi, our CSO, on behalf of the Verizon Sisterhood, a community of fierce and fearless female V Teamers, to share how we need to step up and step forward for women in this current climate, a lot of which rings true for this question. I have to say, there really is nothing more powerful than strong women sitting down at the proverbial table to proclaim a call to action. As women, we need to take risks, pinpoint our passions, and declare them to be done.

Right now, as we reflect on this current moment for women, we know that this is not new. We also know that women leaders are better suited to manage a crisis, they are more trusted, exhibit stronger relational behaviors that help build and restore trust, and have an ability to reframe a problem to reduce emotional stress. Those leadership traits are needed more today than ever. As business leaders, we need to collectively commit support of and action to drive greater equity across programs, behaviors and operations. Our work is far from done.

For young women building a career, or for those that have recently found themselves out of work and trying to rebuild, do not step back; you have the power and potential to transform our future. Keep your foot on the gas. Take risks. Figure out what you love to do, acknowledge that you can do what you love, and declare it to be done. It is better to have taken that risk than to regret your decision not to in the future. Show up with purpose day-in and day-out, even if you fall. Lastly, find and/or build your tribe. Women should have a network of mentors, sponsors and peers to empower and support one another.

I would like to offer this advice to fellow leaders:

1. Wake-up and realize this crisis is real.
2. Bring men along – this can’t just be a conversation among women.
3. Push our bosses, peers and direct reports to both teach us and listen to us.
4. Help women face their fears by providing a safe environment for learning and educational and mentorship opportunities.
5. Practice self-care as we are only our best if we take care of ourselves.

It is only when we lock arms that we can have a louder voice and move the needle.

Verizon is committed to the communities it serves. How critical is it for leading companies to be purpose-driven and to focus on more than just the bottom line?

My team will tell you that one of my favorite sayings is: “Nobody cares how much you know, until they know how much you care.” Now, more than ever, organizations have the responsibility to listen, learn and give back. We need to be a force for good as we strive to turn a moment into a movement.

On that note, I couldn’t be more inspired by Verizon’s recent “Call to Kindness” campaign. In an era of social and political unrest and uncertainty of the future, good old-fashioned manners can go a long way. A smile, a helpful gesture or even just the willingness to understand all sides of the equation will help move us all forward together. ●