

A People Platform

An Interview with Ceree Eberly,
Chief People Officer, The Coca-Cola Company

EDITORS' NOTE Before assuming her current post, Ceree Eberly was Group Human Resources Director for Coca-Cola's European business. In 1990, she joined the company serving in staffing, compensation, and other important roles, supporting business units around the world. In addition, her tenure includes Human Resources Director for the Latin Center Business Unit and Vice President of the McDonald's Division, in charge of Customer Management, Operations, Communications, and Human Resources. She has served as Advisor to the Board, Ronald McDonald House Charities, as a board member for Habitat for Humanity, as an ongoing Coca-Cola mentor, and as a past mentor in the Georgia Executive Women's Leadership Program. Eberly earned her bachelor of arts degree in biology from the University of Tennessee.



Ceree Eberly

COMPANY BRIEF As the world's largest beverage company, The Coca-Cola Company (www.thecoca-colacompany.com) offers consumers nearly 500 sparkling and still brands. Along with Coca-Cola®, the company's portfolio includes 14 other billion dollar brands, including Diet Coke®, Fanta®, Sprite®, Coca-Cola Zero®, vitaminwater®, POWERADE®, Minute Maid® and Georgia® Coffee. Globally, it is the number one provider of sparkling beverages, juices, and juice drinks and ready-to-drink teas and coffees. Through the world's largest beverage distribution system, consumers in more than 200 countries enjoy the company's beverages at a rate of nearly 1.6 billion servings a day.

You lead the people function at Coca-Cola. How is that role defined at the company?

At The Coca-Cola Company, our people are our most important competitive advantage to differentiate us in the marketplace. They represent and help us build the world's greatest brands. Ultimately, that means they fuel our growth and drive the bottom line for our business. My role is to lead the function that makes this a great place to work for all of those associates and to help develop their skills and breadth of experience at this company, as well as to ensure that this is truly a diverse and inclusive workplace.

Would you highlight the importance of diversity and inclusion to the culture of Coca-Cola?

For us, inclusion goes across all genders and races. We strive to make our environment a great place to work for all of our associates. Our people are the face of Coca-Cola and all of our brands to our customers, our consumers, and in our communities. We realize that we need our people to reflect the diversity of our over 500 brands, 20 million customer outlets, and over six billion consumers around the world.

How do your efforts around diversity align with the business strategy of Coca-Cola?

In 2009, we announced our 2020 Vision: Our Roadmap for Winning Together with Our Bottling Partners. This one-page action plan – produced based on collective input from bottlers, associates, and other key stakeholders – put forth a series of clear business priorities and actions for the entire Coca-Cola system as we move towards the next century.

One of the key priorities outlined in this strategy was a "People" platform. Specifically, the company's 2020 Vision People goal is to "be a great place to work" by pursuing three key areas: increasing system knowledge and cross-system movement, which means developing and moving our talent in partnership with our bottlers around the world; inspiring associates to be passionate brand ambassadors; and recruiting, developing, and advancing women leaders, and achieving true diversity in markets around the world.

Coca-Cola has been a leader in advancing women and other minorities. How do you measure the impact of these efforts?

At The Coca-Cola Company, we understand that minorities – including women – are a big part of the trends and forces that are shaping our business in the future. As a company, we have also realized how important it is to have women in positions of leadership to mirror the marketplace in which we operate. This is why we established a Women's Leadership Council in 2007. Comprised of senior women executives throughout our company, the council works to identify strategies to attract and develop more women into leadership positions.

As market dynamics evolve, we regularly measure employee engagement and assess our diversity programs to ensure all employees – across all races and genders – feel they are being offered the best opportunities to develop and advance their careers.

Coca-Cola is known for its leadership in corporate responsibility. How critical is this to the culture of the brand, and how do you engage your employees in these efforts?

As a company, we have seen through our own experiences – time and again – that our business in any market is only as healthy and sustainable as the community in which we operate. It goes beyond just simple corporate responsibility: there is a clear one-to-one relationship in terms of healthy sustainable businesses and healthy sustainable communities.

We believe that it is critical to engage our associates in our sustainability efforts. For this reason, we have introduced programs like LIVE POSITIVELY, which is our system-wide commitment to making a positive difference in the world by redesigning the way we work and live so that sustainability is an integral part of how we operate and our associates live their own personal lives. This program is a way for people to think about their whole lives, not just the work part.

You joined Coca-Cola in 1990. Could you have imagined at that time that you would have spent over 20 years with the company, and what is it about the culture that has made it a place that you have wanted to spend so much of your career?

I joined Coca-Cola because of its global reach and the potential for international development and learning based on my childhood desire to see and experience the world beyond my small town in Tennessee. My first boss gave me the best advice I ever received on my career, when he told me I should focus on putting my head down, on adding value to the business, on performing well, and on contributing to the lives of others and everything else would follow. For 20 years that advice has helped me grow, learn, and have opportunities in our global business in places like Latin America and Europe, as well as experience with our largest customer. I am also a single parent of a 15-year-old who has lived over half his life overseas, speaks three languages, and is fast becoming a global citizen of the world. The company has been very supportive of my needs as a single mother and has given me the flexibility to live this global life balancing work and family in the right way. So my story is just one example of our company's efforts to develop our talent in a diverse and inclusive manner. It has been so much fun. ●