

Creating Opportunities for a More Diverse Future

An Interview with Crystal Castille-Cromedy, Senior Vice President of Talent and Chief Diversity Officer, Hines

EDITORS' NOTE *Crystal Castille-Cromedy leads Hines' talent and DEI strategy. Since first joining Hines in June 2020 as Vice President of Talent, Leadership and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Castille-Cromedy has demonstrated her leadership through the creation and evolution of numerous internal programs such as mentorship initiatives, employee resource groups, performance reviews and succession planning. Additionally, she plays a key role in Hines' major new business pursuits, including the recently selected proposal to redevelop Tropicana Field for the Tampa Bay Rays. Since Castille-Cromedy joined Hines, she has managed a team of 25 people to lead the company's efforts in translating Hines' values and business goals into tangible HR actions. She previously served as the Vice President of HR and Head of the HR Executive Office at BP. Castille-Cromedy received an undergraduate degree from the University of California, Davis and earned an MBA with an emphasis in human resource management from the University of Phoenix.*



Crystal Castille-Cromedy

FIRM BRIEF *Hines (hines.com) is a global real estate investment, development and property manager that was founded by Gerald D. Hines in 1957 and now operates in 30 countries. The firm manages nearly \$96 billion in high-performing assets across residential, logistics, retail, office, and mixed-use strategies. Its local teams serve 480 properties totaling nearly 241 million square feet globally. Hines is committed to a net zero carbon target by 2040 without buying offsets.*

Will you highlight your role and areas of focus?

As the senior vice president of talent and chief diversity officer at Hines, I am responsible for leading the company's talent and DEI strategy. My goal is to ensure that Hines attracts, develops, and retains the best and most diverse talent the globe has to offer, creates high-quality talent outcomes, and achieves equitable diversity representation across the company's employee base. As a strategic business partner, I also work closely with HR to oversee the company's integrated vision for talent acquisition, talent management, talent development, and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

My role includes building upon the creation and evolution of numerous internal programs such as mentorship initiatives, employee resource groups, talent development, performance management, career progression, and succession planning that I have implemented since joining Hines in 2020. I'm also collaborating with HR to create fair and transparent talent practices that can be consistently implemented across the company, regardless of location.

This is a critical part of my platform to elevate employees and increase their sense of belonging at Hines.

How important is it for the HR/Talent function to be engaged in business strategy?

It is imperative for the HR/talent function to be fully engaged in business strategy. At Hines, I work closely with our Chief People Officer and her team on multiple initiatives. The HR/talent functions are responsible for managing the organization's talent – ensuring we have the right people, in the right jobs, at the right time. Therefore, these teams should be involved in strategic decision-making to ensure that the organization's people strategy is aligned with its business priorities.

Business strategy and people strategy are interdependent, and organizations cannot achieve their goals without cohesive alignment between the two. HR/Talent should work closely with business leaders to understand the organization's objectives, identify talent gaps, and develop strategies to attract, retain, and develop a diverse and inclusive workforce that supports the organization's goals.

By collaborating with Hines' HR/talent teams, we can identify potential barriers to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the organization's business strategy and develop plans to mitigate them. For example, if the organization is expanding into a new market, HR/Talent can work with business leaders to ensure that the recruitment process is inclusive, and attracts diverse talent reflective of the new market.

How engrained is diversity, equity, and inclusion in Hines' culture and values?

At Hines, we prioritize the employee experience because our business is about more than constructing and investing in great buildings and projects. Our commitment is

to create environments where people can thrive, whether it's within our workplace, in the spaces we manage, or across the communities we are involved with. We prioritize making a positive social impact in every Hines project.

Will you provide an overview of Hines' diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives?

Our approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion at Hines is designed to apply a DEI lens to the entire talent ecosystem, including access, hiring, belonging, and elevation. Our goal is to create an inclusive environment that values differences, embraces diversity, and celebrates unique perspectives while supporting everyone's growth and development.

In terms of access, we prioritize expanding awareness and access to commercial real estate careers for underrepresented groups. To achieve this, we offer opportunities through campus recruiting initiatives and internship programs like Skyline Scholars, which gives college freshmen and sophomores from underrepresented groups access to the commercial real estate industry.

When it comes to hiring, we believe that a diverse workforce is a stronger and more resilient workforce. As such, we are committed to improving gender and ethnic representation in all job families, especially at the senior leadership level, and building teams that reflect the diversity of the communities in which we operate. Our efforts have already yielded promising results: 15 percent of Skyline Scholars participants have converted to the Hines internship program, 68 percent of our interns are from underrepresented groups, and 64 percent of our full-time graduate hires are from underrepresented groups.

After hiring, our next priority is to ensure that all employees feel a sense of belonging. Our belief is that employees' unique backgrounds and perspectives are essential to driving innovation and advancing ideas that benefit Hines, our stakeholders, and partners. To support this belief, we have created employee resource groups that advance our DEI strategy and promote a firmwide platform to connect employees and celebrate diversity. Hines launched five new ERGs in 2022 for a total of seven with a 45 percent increase in participation from the firm since the launch of these additional ERGs.

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Finally, our focus is on elevating our employees. We recognize that hiring, retaining, and promoting diverse talent are critical to the future of our firm. Our aim is to reflect society and to have the right talent in place to meet the needs of Hines, our stakeholders, employees, and the people globally where we operate. We are taking steps towards solutions, such as updating our officer promotion criteria for greater transparency and launching a new mentoring program to drive progression opportunities for all employees. Currently, 41 percent of our workforce is female, 36 percent represent a U.S. racial/ethnic minority group of which 10 percent are officers, and 21 percent of our officers are female, including our CO-CEO, Laura Hines-Pierce. While we are proud of our progress, we recognize the journey ahead and are determined to continue creating opportunities for a more diverse future.

Will you elaborate on the importance of developing employee resource groups as part of Hines’ DEI work?

Hines’ employee resource groups are designed to advance our DEI strategy and create a firmwide platform to connect employees and celebrate diversity. These groups serve as a commitment to provide a space for employee awareness, engagement, connection, and learning. The goal is to provide equity through increased empathy, education, and action that drives employee engagement, increases employee understanding, and ultimately creates a greater sense of belonging for all employees.

The seven employee resource groups at Hines are the OneHines Women’s Network (OHWN); PRIDE; Black Employees Advocacy Network (BEAN); Latino & Hispanic Employee Resource Network (LHERN); CARE (Working Caregivers); OneHines Asian Network & Alliance (OHANA); and Alliance for Veterans Engagement (AVE).

How critical are metrics to measure the impact of Hines’ DEI efforts?

Metrics are essential to measure the impact of DEI efforts, but they only tell half the story. Metrics help organizations to track progress, identify gaps, and hold themselves accountable for creating a more diverse and inclusive workplace, but having good, clean data is one of the largest hurdles industries face when enacting DEI plans. It’s not only

about increases in percentages, but how employees feel in the workplace and have confidence in their ability to successfully grow their careers.

Even with the most reliable and consistent data, it is important to note that metrics should not be the only tool used to measure the success of DEI efforts. Qualitative data such as feedback from employees and other stakeholders, anecdotes, and stories can provide additional proof points and insight into the impact of DEI initiatives. Ultimately, a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data provides a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of DEI efforts.

How does having diverse perspectives and experiences at the table drive better business outcomes?

Having diverse perspectives and experiences at the table is critical to driving better business outcomes. This diversity of thought and experience can also help a company identify new opportunities and markets that they may have otherwise overlooked. In addition, diverse teams are more likely to reflect the needs and wants of a diverse clientele base. This can lead to better service and a better understanding of a client’s needs, which can help drive business growth. Furthermore, research has shown that diverse teams are more productive and creative. When individuals feel valued and included, they are more likely to contribute their best ideas and work collaboratively with others.

- A report by McKinsey & Company (2020) found that companies with higher gender diversity on executive teams were more likely to outperform on profitability and value creation.

- A study by Boston Consulting Group (2018) found that companies with more diverse management teams have 19 percent higher innovation revenue than companies with less diverse teams.

By embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion, companies can create a culture that values and leverages the unique perspectives and strengths of all employees, leading to a more successful and sustainable business.

Do you feel that there are strong opportunities for women to grow and lead in the industry?

We are seeing opportunities for women increase within the commercial real estate industry, although we still have a ways to go to create meaningful change. I often say, “Change doesn’t happen overnight, but progress happens daily.” Hines is an organization that is dedicated to creating opportunities for women, and it starts from our executive office. Last year, Laura Hines-Pierce was promoted to Co-CEO of the firm and sits next to her father, Jeff Hines, overseeing the firm’s strategy and management. Shortly after increasing Hines’ U.S. Paid Family Leave Policy from 8 weeks to up to 16 weeks, Laura understood first-hand the importance of work-life balance for caregivers as she began her own family. She worked hard to set the example that women are supported and can achieve their career aspirations while still prioritizing family. Laura also serves as co-executive sponsor to Hines’ Working Caregiver ERG (Care), reinforcing her personal commitment to this cause.

You joined Hines in 2020. What excited you about the opportunity and has it been what you expected?

I was initially attracted to Hines because it presented an opportunity to join a company that valued diversity, equity, and inclusion, and had a strong commitment to driving change in this area. This created a great space for me to work with a group of talented people while taking the lead in making meaningful strides of improvement. Working for a company whose leadership recognizes that a diverse workforce and inclusive culture is not only the right thing to do, but also critical for achieving business success, was important to me, and I knew it would be critical to my success at the organization.

Three years later, I am grateful to work with a team of passionate individuals and leaders who are committed to advancing DEI in the company and the real estate industry as a whole. Hines has a strong track record of success, and we have been able to build on that foundation to create meaningful change.

Hines’ commitment to DEI is genuine and is reflected in its actions, not just its words. I am continuously impressed by the level of engagement from leadership and the willingness of employees at all levels to participate in DEI initiatives. ●