



Communicate the Change You Want to See in the World

Leading communications professionals share their views on diversity, equity and inclusion



Ragan
Consulting
Group

raganconsulting.com

Contents

3. Become a Change Agent

4. What Communicators Do Best

5. Diversity Theater

6. A Hispanic Communicator
Evangelizes Her Truth

8. Change is Beautiful

10. Southwest's North Star

12. Brand Journalism as a
Public Service

14. Contact RCG

Become a Change Agent

It was a Saturday morning in June 2020, just days after George Floyd was murdered by a white Minneapolis police officer. Janet Stovall, then speechwriter for UPS' CEO and other senior leaders, was having breakfast with her daughter when the then director of public affairs called to schedule an emergency meeting. Carole Tomé, who had been CEO for only a week, issued a public statement that the company would not tolerate racism and "sit idly by."

Like many companies in that moment, UPS was wading into unfamiliar waters.

"I was thrilled to see UPS make such a powerful commitment—but I didn't have any idea how we were going to deliver on it," recalls Stovall, one of the few Black speechwriters to have worked at the C-level in the Fortune 500. She is now a senior client strategist at NeuroLeadership Institute and principal of Pragmatic Diversity, the consultancy she founded.

The meeting gathered the most interdisciplinary group Stovall had ever seen at UPS.

"Ideas were flying left and right about what that effort would look like for a global company with over half a million employees," she says. "All I could think was, 'It's going to be my job to shape all this into a coherent story. So, I said, 'Stop: we need a framework.'"

On a napkin, she drew a grid that aligned stakeholders, core capabilities, and where the company could make the most impact. Her sketch became the framework for UPS' Equity, Justice and Action Task Force.

As a result, UPS urged immediate passage of the federal Antilynching Act and state-based hate crime bills; provided \$3.2 million to support the National Urban League, the NAACP, United Negro College Fund and the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights' Education Fund; and committed another \$1 million to the National Museum of African American History and Culture, among other measures.

Janet Stovall

Former manager of executive communications for UPS.



Stovall's contribution to the task force illustrates the critical role that communicators play at their organizations: Beyond speeches, press releases and pitches to the media, they need to be change agents.

“This is where communicators play a key role,” Stovall says. “They connect dots, find gaps, and hold companies accountable. That’s what we do. We ask people to prove what they say, to support their arguments. No communicator in their right mind wants to put out fluff they can’t back up.”

As the country emerges from the pandemic while marking the one-year anniversary of Floyd’s murder, a discussion on how communications can and should drive positive social change is not only timely; it sets the direction for the profession’s future. For this special report on diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace, we’ve interviewed six women working as communications executives across multiple industries, from healthcare to beauty.

To compete now and in the future, corporate decision makers must take DE&I as seriously as any other strategic imperative, including digital business transformation, the communications leaders say. And just as technology changes, so do the people using it.

What Communicators DO BEST

Diversity Theater

“Given demographic changes, whites will be the numerical minority in two decades,” says Kim Clark, a Ragan Consulting Group team member specializing in DE&I-related communications.

“If you want to remain relevant you have to do the work now. If you simply try to attract marginalized populations but haven’t created an inclusive culture, they will turnstile and walk out.”

Indeed, the population of the United States will be “majority minority” —majority people of color — by 2043, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. While the non-Hispanic white population will remain the largest single group, no group will make up a majority. People representing two or more races are projected to be the fastest growing population over the next several decades, followed by single-race Asians and Hispanics of any race.

Despite its importance, DE&I is not always given the respect it deserves. Frequently, such duties are added to employees’ already heavy workloads. Or, companies might “try to do the right thing” by hiring a chief diversity officer, but then don’t give the person a budget and don’t listen to recommendations, RCG’s Clark says. For her part, Stovall has seen chief diversity officers doubling as heads of philanthropy, prompting her to pose the rhetorical question “Is diversity philanthropy?”

“That’s diversity theater,” Clark says. “No budget, no team, but you hire a diversity specialist. Accountability is missing.”

Kim Clark

Diversity, equity and
inclusion consultant for
Ragan Consulting Group.





A Hispanic communicator evangelizes her truth

At Westinghouse Electric Company, accountability starts with CEO Patrick Fragman and the executive team he has been assembling since taking the helm of the company two years ago, says Chief Communications and Brand Officer Marta Ronquillo Newhart. In addition to hiring Newhart herself, he has put two other women in key leadership positions: Evonne Bennett Brown as chief diversity and inclusion officer and Melissa Cummings as executive vice president of Digital and Innovation.

"If you don't have the CEO's commitment, [DE&I] is just an initiative that somebody starts," Newhart says, noting that her own appointment embodies the company's inclusive mission. "You have to have people with strong business acumen thinking about DE&I and pushing for it—with the same level of process, rigor and discipline that you'd apply to finance, strategy, margin expansion and cost control."

But it was her cousin Silvana Salcido Esparza, the James Beard Award-nominated chef, who inspired Newhart to get real.



Silvana Salcido Esparza

“

“Two years ago, she reached out to me and said, ‘Look around Corporate America. Do you see people like us? What are you going to do about it?’”

Touched profoundly by her cousin’s comments, Newhart decided to use her platform to evangelize the business value of a diversity-first mindset. She has penned columns and spoken at the World Economic Forum on inclusive hiring practices to help other Hispanics rise to the top.

“The aperture for this type of dialogue has never been wider,” she says. “And I think it’s changed the way we think about Hispanics in the U.S., and their role not only in immigration but also in business, revenue generation and technology. It’s getting more and more positive. You don’t hear as many negative jokes about us.”

In her LinkedIn column, she urges businesses to adapt to America’s changing face by acknowledging the evolution of the beauty industry.

“Not too long ago, there were three shades of foundation to choose from—light, medium and dark,” she writes. “But, as the complexion of the world changed, literally, the beauty business started blending custom shades with different undertones and nuances to match the human palette being created by the mix of ethnicities.”

Change is beautiful



Enter Crystal Andrews Banks,
Ulta Beauty's director of
diversity and inclusion.

As a member of the Corporate Communications and Diversity and Inclusion Department, she is part of a multifaceted team responsible for Project Embrace, which...

“is our opportunity to infuse D and I into how we do business at Ulta Beauty,” she says.

Project Embrace reflects the collaboration of 60 employees who are embedding an inclusive “lens” across three strategic pillars: employees (called associates), store guests and corporate reputation. Their work supports the mission of the company's Diversity and Inclusion Council, chaired by CEO Dave Kembell.

“Last year, we were focused on raising awareness about the lived experiences of our associates and creating safe spaces to have courageous conversations. It was all about learning,” Andrews Banks says. “This year is about owning your voice and understanding who you are and what you bring to the table to create change in the world.”

For spring and summer, the company is rolling out an extensive line of programming, digital content and other marketing materials to reflect diversity. In May, the company recognized Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month and Mental Health Awareness Month. In June, the company's website, social channels, printed mailer, and in-store signage are prioritizing Pride Month and highlight brands providing financial support to LGBTQ+ communities.

With the one-year anniversary of George Floyd's murder as context, June also provides a time for racial healing and reflection within the company.

Ulta is inviting employees to attend a variety of virtual events, including a keynote discussion on racial injustice in partnership with the Equal Justice Initiative, the nonprofit founded by Bryan Stevenson, the attorney

and bestselling author of "Just Mercy." (EJI provides legal representation to people who have been illegally convicted, unfairly sentenced, or abused in state jails and prisons.)

The beauty company is also planning a "Radical Self-care for Radical Times" workshop hosted by HealHaus, a Brooklyn-based wellness center, and giving associates a unique platform to share their voice: corporate, internal videos featuring racial injustice and the need for equality as key themes.

Store guests may notice changes as they shop, too. "Associates are being very intentional and purposeful with the behaviors they display with guests and with each other," Andrews Banks says. "We're being mindful with how we show up, checking our unconscious bias."



Southwest's north star

Whether your products are nuclear power or mascara, your company's audiences are increasingly demanding a focus on social issues.

At the height of the pandemic, Southwest Airlines hired a consulting firm to conduct a materiality assessment used to identify environmental, social and governance issues affecting a business. As part of the process, the firm interviewed multiple stakeholders—from employees to investors—about the issues they thought the airline should prioritize.



Laurie Barnett

Southwest Airline's managing
director of communications
and outreach

Laurie Barnett, the airline's managing director of communications and outreach, detailed the project during a Ragan Communications webinar on the communicator's role in promoting ESG investing criteria.

"We invited people to participate in an assessment about the difference we can make and the influence we can have," Barnett says. "DEI and greenhouse gas emissions rose to the top of what our stakeholders believe we need to focus on and be investing in."

The foundation of the airline's accountability is structure.

While Barnett has been with the company for 25 years, Ellen Torbert held several roles at the airline before being named vice president of diversity, equity and inclusion nine years ago. They are both actively involved in several multidepartment committees, including DE&I-specific working groups and the Citizenship Executive Steering Group, which looks at all ESG-related activities. In addition, the cross-department Social Topics Committee reviews social issues as they arise, decides whether to engage or comment within 12 hours, and crafts responses when they deem appropriate.

After Floyd's murder and the growing conversation around social justice, corporate decision-makers felt the need to communicate their values more explicitly, Barnett says.

In September 2020, CEO Gary Kelly recorded a video outlining the airline's heightened DE&I commitments.

"While our diversity imperatives across the years laid a good foundation, we know we must commit to closely focusing in areas like diversity in senior leadership and supplier diversity," he says. "We continue to look

for opportunities to better reflect in our organization the diverse demographics of the communities we serve."

Kelly said the airline would refresh hiring practices to support diversity goals, including posting all open leadership positions (supervisor to vice president) and requiring diverse candidate slates for each. He also promised to double the percentage of racial diversity and increase gender diversity in senior management by 2025.

The values are seen in both word and deed. Quinnie Jenkins, a Black member of Barnett's

“**Reputation is at the heart of our profession. All of these activities are related to it - we've got to take an active role. We are in a unique seat to pull all the activities together.**”

team, spoke in a June 2020 corporate video to announce a \$500,000 donation to the National Urban League and 100 Black Men of America—that's in addition to the airline's history of supporting nonprofit organizations.

The video appears in the Southwest One Report, the airline's annual financial and citizenship report, which Barnett presented to communications professionals during the Ragan webinar.

Brand Journalism as a public service

Dr. Vonzella Bryant, an attending physician at Boston Medical Center, has seen the toll that racism takes on one's health. At the height of the pandemic, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts gave her the opportunity to share her story.

"If your family, like so many through our history, suffered "red-lining" discrimination and was unjustly denied a mortgage for a house in a neighborhood with a good school system, parks and grocery stores, that put your health at risk," she writes in her column "When Racism is the Medical Emergency."

Bryant's piece appears in Coverage, the news service produced by the nonprofit insurer's communications team. It's part of a series of articles curated in partnership with Diva Docs—a professional organization of Black women physicians working in Greater Boston.

"We've had a very strong sense of purpose from the time the pandemic broke out," says Jennifer Miller, managing editor, corporate communications, at BCBS Massachusetts. She is the founding editor of Coverage, which launched in November 2019.

"We recognized as a team what any comms team would: We're in the midst of something that will happen once in our lifetimes, hopefully," she says. "We really felt that this is our purpose as communicators—to contribute to this once-in-a-lifetime public health campaign."



In recent months, Coverage’s editorial team has written stories that support the insurer’s commitment to social, racial and economic justice. Themes range from the need to ensure equal access to the COVID-19 vaccine to combatting anti-Asian bias.

In a story about the nonprofit’s health equity initiatives, Rachel Coppola, a member of Coverage’s editorial team, quotes Blue Cross Chief Diversity Officer Stephanie Brown as saying: “The health inequities we see today didn’t happen overnight. They are the product of centuries of structural racism in this country that persists to this day and has shaped everything from the segregation of housing to the segregation of the health care system.”

For her part, Miller sees brand journalism as a way to engage members, physicians and the community at large with fact-based and compassionate storytelling, while supporting the organization’s long-term goals. As a product of the communications team, Coverage is helping to build awareness and thought leadership via numerous awards and article syndication.

Miller offers sound advice to communications professionals interested in storytelling as a vehicle for change.

“Whatever you’re working on, you’re going to see certain names, the usual pundits. But, other experts do exist,” Miller says. “You need to go out and find them and amplify their voices. There are Hispanic, Black, Asian, LGBTQ+ and differently abled thinkers and leaders in every field. There’s a very rich pipeline if you cast a wide net—and it’s very much worth it.”

Create meaningful change in your organization.

Need help creating Employee Resource Groups? Want to provide a series of diversity trainings for employees? Need an inclusive language toolkit for leaders? We can help.



**To schedule a complimentary
call with One of our DE&I
experts, email:**

Kristin.Hart@raganconsulting.com



**Visit our website for more
news, views and resources:**

www.raganconsulting.com

Thanks for reading!

We're not your typical consultants at RCG.

We won't parachute in, spout jargon, and offer templated solutions from some other client's long-ago problems. We don't send in junior staffers to do the work because we don't have any.

We listen first. We speak your language. We've worked in the trenches.

Founded in 2016 as a full-service agency, Ragan Consulting Group specialize in brand journalism, employee engagement, diversity equity & inclusion, PR, media relations, social media, storytelling, video and crisis communications.

RCG has helped hundreds of public companies, private organizations, utilities and government agencies improve their internal and external communications.

We're look forward to chatting with you, to learn about your challenges.

raganconsulting.com

