

HOW **BABY BOOMERS** ARE  
RECLAIMING THEIR CAREERS

|| PRACTICING  
INCLUSIVE ETIQUETTE

|| THE QUEST FOR  
TRANSGENDER INCLUSION

# INCLUSION

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*Creating Globally Inclusive &  
Culturally Competent Workplaces*

THE WINTERS GROUP'S

MARY-  
FRANCES  
WINTERS

Leading the charge on  
implementing inclusive practices



# Mary-Frances Winters

Founder, President & CEO, The Winters Group, Inc.

Helping organizations keep pace as diversity evolves.

**M**ARY-FRANCES WINTERS launched The Winters Group in 1984. The Winters Group develops diversity and inclusion strategies for Fortune 500 companies, nonprofits, and organizations in the educational sector.

Prior to founding The Winters Group, Winters was an affirmative action officer and senior market analyst at Eastman Kodak Company. She was named a diversity pioneer by *Profiles in*

*Diversity Journal* in August 2007 and received the Winds of Change Award from the Forum on Workplace Inclusion in 2016. She was also featured in the June 2016 issue of *Forbes* magazine, which honored some of the DC Metro area's most powerful women.

A life member of the board of trustees of the University of Rochester, Winters has served on the boards of the Greater Rochester Metro Chamber of Commerce, the United Way of Greater Rochester, and the National Board of the Girl Scouts of the USA. She has served as a mentor for the Emerging Leaders Program sponsored by the Centers for Leadership and Public Affairs at Duke University and the University of Cape Town, South Africa.

Winters is a frequent contributor to the editorial page of the local newspaper and *USA Today's* Forum column on workplace- and diversity-related issues. She has been published in the International Personnel Management Association newsletter, *Profiles in Diversity Journal*, *DiversityInc* magazine, *Executive Excellence* magazine, and Society of Human Resource Management's *Mosaics* newsletter. She is the author of three books: *Only Wet Babies Like Change: Workplace Wisdom for Baby Boomers*, *Inclusion Starts With 'I'*, and *CEOs Who Get It: Diversity Leadership from the Heart and Soul*.

She is a graduate of the University of Rochester, where she also earned an MBA from the William E. Simon Executive Development Program. She received an honorary doctorate from Roberts Wesleyan College in 1997.

**INCLUSION:** What will be some of the biggest issues and challenges in 2017 for corporate diversity and inclusion leaders?

**Mary-Frances Winters:** We just released the 2016 edition of our Global D&I Trends Report, where we share some of the most pressing issues impacting how we do this work today and in the future. Four of those are religious diversity, LGBTQIA rights, the global workplace, and race.

For years, religious diversity has been a topic that many organizations have shied away from

in their diversity agendas. As religious minorities become more visible and vocal in the United States, I anticipate religious diversity gaining more significance in the workplace. Inclusion is truly about bring one's "full self," and for many, religion is a big part of their identity.

LGBTQIA rights in the US and abroad have progressed tremendously over the past few years. However, there is still so much to be done. In addition, as our understanding of gender and gender identity expands, organizations will need to be prepared to educate employees and also align their practices as such. Addressing some of the issues and challenges specific to the transgender community will also be important.

It is no secret that the global workforce is changing. There have been and will continue to be rapid demographic shifts. As a result, the global workforce is becoming increasingly female, younger and older, and nonwhite. Companies will need to continue to focus on cultural competence to understand these shifts and challenge their status quo.

Finally, race isn't new to D&I work. This work is rooted in compliance, which has traditionally been focused on race and gender. However, race has and continues to be one of the more challenging areas of diversity for organizations. In some organizations, it's even avoided. A lot of this has to do with fear and hesitation around dialogue, especially given today's social climate across our country. Racial inequities continue to persist within organizations and society—we'll need to begin talking about race if we intend on changing that anytime soon.

**IN:** What are some of the recent thought-leader topics in the world of inclusion that organizations are learning about and implementing?

**MW:** I think one of the biggest areas of exploration that organizations should begin considering and implementing is around how to respond to trauma in the workplace. Over the last year, in the US and abroad, we experienced a number of tragic events. These events impact employees. And if we are to truly create environments where employees can bring their "whole self," we must begin to identify ways

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we can cultivate environments that truly support that. Developing cultural competence and addressing unconscious bias will also remain two critical areas of exploration and practice for leaders.

**IN:** How has the accelerated globalization in recent years affected D&I strategies?

**MW:** Now more than ever, culturally competent leadership is critical. It is not enough for leaders to be "sensitive to" differences and other cultures. Rather, they must be competent in navigating and adapting across them. I choose to position "competence" over "sensitivity," because competence suggests a journey and ongoing development. If leaders and organizations expect to be successful, effective, and innovative on a global scale, cultural competence is requisite.

**IN:** Have your clients asked for your help in becoming more inclusive of transgender people? What do you recommend? What are some of the challenges you have seen?

**MW:** Transgender inclusion has definitely become an area of greater inquiry. What I have found to be the biggest area of opportunity for our clients and organizations is the need to broaden awareness and encourage dialogue. The reality is, you don't know what you don't know, and often that "unknown" can foster fear. Most of the discourse and dissension on LGBT in the political arena result from a lack of understanding and an inability to see common ground. This same dynamic has the potential to manifest in the workplace. People sometimes get tired of hearing this, but I contend that education is key. And being intentional about expanding your way of thinking. D&I leaders and practitioners should be doing the same.

**IN:** As more and more Millennials join the job force, and as baby boomers are slowly aging, has this phenomenon presented challenges for your clients?

**MW:** Managing across generations and creating a culture that is inclusive of these very different—though, in some ways, similar—groups can be a challenge. Some of our clients experience disparities in retention, for example. They may be retaining baby boomers, but have been unable to do the same for Xers and Millennials. This obviously has implications for talent challenges as more and more baby boomers begin to retire. We've encouraged our clients to dig deeper into understanding how employees across generations are experiencing the workplace. Conduct focus groups, utilize data, and analyze across generational segments—it's not enough to make assumptions, and organizations can only begin to address these challenges if they know what's causing them.

**IN:** How will the chief diversity officer role change in the next five years?

**MW:** I anticipate the CDO role growing in its influence over the next five years. Particularly as more CEOs continue to grow in their understanding of the implications of a global workforce and marketplace. CDOs will need to balance strong business acumen with the skills and competencies of a D&I practitioner.

CDOs will need to be futurists, anticipating the next trend. They'll need to be systems thinkers with the capability to grasp the interconnectedness of seemingly unrelated issues. They need to be at all tables where strategy and key future business and organizational goals are being discussed. It is a vital role with vast implications for the survival of the planet.

**IN:** How does a company best cultivate a diverse talent pipeline?

**MW:** At the surface level, the organization must broaden its scope of outreach—this should include partnering with organizations that serve diverse constituencies and investing in internal development programs. These are your HB-CUs, affinity-based professional organizations, community organizations, and internship programs. However, that's not enough. While expanding outreach and developing programs can build a pipeline, companies must also ensure that there aren't processes and practices in place that act as barriers to building a diverse pipeline. Cultural competence and unconscious bias, both, play a role. If recruiters and hiring managers are not culturally competent enough to decipher and navigate cultural differences that may exist in how individuals interview, communicate, etcetera, then they run the risk of missing out on potentially valuable talent. Likewise, if there are no accountability measures in place to ensure unconscious biases are not impacting screening and selection processes, then efforts in pipeline and outreach activities are in vain.

**IN:** For a number of years, practitioners of diversity and inclusion have been making the business case for D&I. Do you think this message is sinking in?

**MW:** I think leaders and clients are understanding the business case. The data are

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there and make the case plain and clear. The challenging part is the "how." We take the approach of shifting our clients' mindset from viewing D&I as a "one-off" or isolated "initiative," to seeing it as a strategic journey. That said, it is not enough to package a training, get all your leaders in a room for one day, and expect the outcomes that have been associated with inclusion—innovation, creative, engagement, etcetera. Developing inclusive leaders is a competency, and much like any other competency, it requires ongoing development and intentionality. This is the approach we take with our clients.

**IN:** Tell us about your greatest success story.

**MW:** Staying in business for 32 years. When I started in 1984, it was so rare [for a woman to launch her own business] that the local newspaper [in Rochester, New York] did an article with the headline, "Woman starts business in

her basement." My managers and colleagues thought I was crazy to leave a "good job" with a good future to venture out on my own. I was told that one vice president said, "Let her go. She will come back in six months begging for her job back." Actually that was my motivation, not to have to ever beg for anything. I started the company because I did not think I could reach my full potential in the corporate world. At that time, there were even more barriers. As a woman of color, I felt like I was being evaluated by managers who had deep-seated stereotypes about my capabilities.

Running a business has had its many challenges as well. I have had other people of color say that they could not hire The Winters Group because of the optics. They would need to go with a company headed by someone of another ethnicity. We have also been through at least three recessions and still we stand.

However, I think the greatest part of all of this is that my daughter, Mareisha Reese, is now chief operating officer, doing a stellar job at helping to grow the business. In the early years, I had dreamed of The Winters Group becoming a family business, and now it truly is with Mareisha and Keley Smith, my niece, who serves as operations manager.

Over the years I have mentored many other women who have wanted to rise in leadership or start their own business. It is gratifying when I hear from one of them who tells me that I contributed to her career and life in a meaningful way. Success only comes because others support you, and I have also been mentored and supported by a number of amazing men and women who have taught me many valuable lessons, including the power of networking and collaboration. I know that I stand on the shoulders of the generations of successful women both famous and unsung who paved the way for me to do what I do and be who I am. I am grateful. **IN**