

Interview with Deb Taylor  
February 5, 2008

John Deere considers diversity a key driver of its past success and imperative to its future growth plans. As such, the organization places a lot of importance on its diversity and inclusion strategy. Crucial to the integration piece of this strategy is the buy-in and commitment of leaders and managers throughout the organization. An important component of John Deere's diversity integration strategy is Linkage's *Summit on Leading Diversity*. Over the last 3 years, Deb has grown John Deere's participation in the Summit from 3 people in the diversity office to 70 participants hailing from all business units and functions within John Deere.

The following interview between Robin Pedrelli – Co-Program Director of Linkage's *Summit on Leading Diversity* – and Deborah Taylor – Director of Global Diversity and Inclusion for John Deere – was conducted to provide an opportunity for Deb Taylor to share this best practice in gaining organization-wide support for diversity and inclusion.

**Robin: What is the John Deere business case for diversity?**

*Deb: Diversity has been important to John Deere since the early 1960s – even before the 1965 equal opportunity laws were passed. Originally the diversity programs focused primarily on EEO, but they have since evolved to a deeper focus on inclusion and support our overall business strategy of aligned high-performance teamwork.*

*The John Deere Business Case, I would think, is much like other organizations. We believe it is key to our ability to respond to the changing demographics in the US and globally. Diversity is closely tied to our global growth strategy and our ability to remain competitive in the ever-intensifying war for talent.*

*Employee expectations are changing. Technology is also making it easier to develop a more inclusive environment and is transforming the way we do work.*

**Robin: What was the impetus for building a large team of participants to attend an off-site diversity training event?**

**Deb:** *In order to maintain momentum and integrate our diversity initiative with the business, I strongly believe that we need to engage more employees to implement and sustain the improvements we need in the work environment. Attending off-site training such as Linkage's Summit on Leading Diversity enables us to see what other companies are doing, to network and to exchange ideas.*

**Robin:** **Why did you choose Linkage's *Summit on Leading Diversity*?**

**Deb:** *I attend many conferences and continue to do so each year. I reviewed several in the U.S. before picking one event to recommend for our team. I chose Linkage's Summit on Leading Diversity for several reasons. The content and learning provided each year is consistently some of the best that I've seen. The information is presented via several different learning formats in ways that suits many different learning styles. The combination of the high-level keynote speakers, the breakout learning sessions, workshops, and the applied learning teams (facilitator-led small work groups) ensure that the learning takes place through dialogue and interaction, not just one-way conversations. In addition, the Linkage Summit incorporates great opportunities for networking.*

**Robin:** **How were you able to gain interest outside the office of diversity, and how did you secure the financial support of the organization?**

**Deb:** *This was a process that was crafted over several years. I initially attended this event with just two to three people from my team. When I decided that John Deere's diversity initiative could benefit from sending a larger group to this event, I put extra money in my own budget to seed the interest from other functional groups up front. We sent about 20 people and paid for the 20 people out of the diversity budget. I was very strategic in choosing the 20 people to attend. I invited key influencers and stakeholders in the company who understood the importance of diversity. Following the event, I asked those employees for feedback and solicited their support to get more support outside the diversity office. They went back to*

*their various businesses and talked about what they had learned. They became supporters and they encouraged others to add this event to their annual budgets.*

*The key to securing the funding was getting back to the employees that attended the conference before they engaged in the budget process and reminding them to allot money in their own budgets to send members from their teams. We continue to go back each year and remind people during the budget process, but the popularity of this event makes it easier for us to garner support.*

*Now we have so much support and interest that we need to cap the attendance each year. And each year we send different employees to the Summit. The only repeaters are out of the diversity staff.*

**Robin: What were the main challenges in organizing and making this happen?**

*Deb: Logistics. Getting them to participate the way we want them to is difficult at times. . Our connection with the attendees is ongoing and involves touch points upfront, onsite, and post-event. It is important that we ensure that participants use what they learned in the business. Each year the group that has attended grows. We stay connected and in touch with past attendees from every year ensuring the impact and reach broadens exponentially.*

*Managing the experience for seventy people can be a lot of work. And I am fortunate to have someone in my department that manages this experience among the many other diversity projects that we support.*

**Robin: What is the most rewarding part of the experience for you?**

*Deb: I value the opportunity for the networking and the high quality of keynote speakers. I still come back from the conference each year with a lot of new insight and information.*

**Robin:** And for the people who attended?

**Deb:** *The folks that attended the Summit really start to see the role they can play. They leave with a better understanding of – “here’s what I can do.”*

**Robin:** What was the ROI for John Deere, and how did each attendee use the information gained at the Summit?

**Deb:** *We see big returns on our diversity strategy. Key people in the business return to the office energized around helping to improve our workplace from the diversity and inclusion perspective. We have seen an increase in the completion of project plans and we see some of the learning being implemented around the world of John Deere.*

*The employees that attend the Summit are applying what they learned to their local business and are experiencing better interactions with customers and employees. We enjoy greater support of diversity throughout the year and can honestly say that diversity is now embedded in the business.*

*By sending 70 plus different people each year, we are experiencing a compounded rate of return.*

**Robin:** What is next for John Deere’s diversity’s program?

**Deb:** *In 2009 I have a goal of potentially sending wage employees to this conference. We had several wage employees request the opportunity to attend after the conference last year. Our John Deere Diversity and Inclusion strategy is the basis for a much broader initiative called Team Enrichment. Our chairman understands that in order to achieve our business goals, we need to improve the performance of our teams around the world. We believe diversity and inclusion is the foundation for the success with our Team Enrichment program.*

*As we implement global team enrichment councils – similar to diversity councils – we would like the councils to also consider attending The Summit on Leading Diversity. This will allow us to tie the diversity and inclusion strategies with Team Enrichment and strengthen the relationship between diversity and inclusion and business performance.*

**Robin: Can you share any final words of advice for any other organization looking to spearhead an initiative like this?**

*Deb: Make sure you have the support from top leadership and that what you are doing is aligned with an overall strategy for leveraging diversity and inclusion.*

*Remember that I attended three times on my own before embarking on this. When I decided to do this I made sure I had that support. Start building the momentum for the next year immediately following the current year's event. The earlier you are on the radar, the better.*

*Perhaps most importantly, you need to know your own business very well.*

**Robin: Are there any personal testimonies from the line leaders you can share?**

**Deb:**

*Comments from line leaders from the John Deere 2007 Summit Team:*

- Overall, an excellent conference experience.
- This was a good conference. I appreciated the opportunity to attend. In many ways, the conference was thought provoking. For our overall success on driving focus on this business need, I do not plan to attend in 2008 because I think we need to give others business managers an opportunity to gain exposure.
- For me it was really surprising and important to realize that we have a different understanding of what diversity and minority means. Clearly, depending of where you come from the understanding is different. This realization will be helpful in my own work when I'm dealing with 7 different countries.

- Overall the summit was a really positive experience with very good presentations. This is a very professional conference and hopefully they can make it more attractive to international participants as I think this would benefit all.
- The Leading Diversity Conference was one of the best conferences I have ever attended. Most of the keynote speakers were inspiring and encouraging. Just fantastic. Even with such a huge group of attendees, I felt connected.
- Overall this was an excellent event and worth the time and cost.
- Greatly enjoyed having 70 JD participants, allowed bouncing off others from other units' feedback and discussion about sessions.
- Initially was not sure, the conference was going to be worth the time, but by the end, I was very glad I went, it changed my perception of diversity, I will be recommending to continue to send future leaders to participate from Waterloo.
- The conference was an opportunity for me to experience the degree of diversity across Deere and the wider audience of the US. Coming from an international location I am aware of diversity but didn't truly appreciate its impact locally. It has broadened my perspective.
- Very good conference. I would recommend it to others and if possible, would like to attend again next year. The conference gave me a lot of new ideas and re-energized me around our diversity and inclusion efforts.
- Overall, the conference was excellent. It was an eye-opening look into what the future holds and where we need to be headed with diversity. I was glad to see that there were many attendees that were outside of HR. If we're going to infiltrate this throughout the organization, it needs to come from HR *and* people in operations.
- This was a very eye opening experience. I've never spent much time thinking about or understanding diversity and its importance to our business. Excellent conference and top notch keynote speakers.
- The conference was a good experience for me – not always enjoyable. As a white male you take for granted many day-to-day experiences where others are not as fortunate. There were aspects of the conference that I did not agree with although it was good to see a different perspective on issues of diversity.
- I thought the conference was an OUTSTANDING experience that EVERYONE in the company could get significant benefits from. I only marked that I would not attend in 2008 because I think it's too important to "spread the word" to other employees. If I return, I would be taking someone else's spot.

- I thought the Learning Team meetings were a good experience with some excellent dialogue. Each workshop I attended offered me insight that I will put into practice on the job.
- Nicely done. The conference went very well. The keynote speakers were all excellent.
- I wasn't sure what to expect before attending. I enjoyed the facts that were shared as well as the personal experiences of the speakers. I thought the networking exercises were well designed (learning teams, World Café).
- Excellent conference! The information provided was very beneficial to me and to some issues that I've been working on in my area. This couldn't have been more timely for me. Linkage did an excellent job of providing quality key-note speakers. The Deere staff also did a great job of preparing us to attend the conference and in helping to insure that the company gains maximum value from this experience. I only checked "no" on the plans to attend next years summit as I would like to see some of my peers attend – I'll send you a list!
- It was an excellent experience for me. I feel more comfortable with the topics of diversity and inclusion.