



More than years into the pandemic, what has the workplace revolution revealed? [From Day One's one-day conference](#) at Denver's Ellie Caulkins Opera House brought together leading thinkers and top executives in HR and related fields for a conversation about how organizations can build stronger bonds of trust with their workers and their communities. The speakers included leaders from Western Union, VF Corp., Vail Resorts, Medtronic, Hunter Douglas, and the City and County of Denver. Among the timely questions: How can companies stay true to their core values, and accountable to their stakeholders, while making enormous changes? Highlights from the conference:

Enriching Your Company culture With Allyship, Advocacy and Belonging

By Rachel Walker Youngblade

"It all starts with listening," [VF Corporation's](#) Lauren Guthrie said of her role as Vice President of Global Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Action (IDEA) at From Day One's [Denver conference](#). Her approach builds on the familiar term "DEI" with an added element of "action," rooted in deep listening.

Guthrie's passion for storytelling and consumer advocacy led her to a career in merchandising at several high-profile retail brands, including Nike, Levi's, Old Navy and her most recent role at The North Face. A frank conversation with the CEO of VF, The North Face's holding company,

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about how the company could use their power and scale to address some of the issues that were affecting their employees evolved into an opportunity to step into her current role.

“How I found myself in this role was by elevating my voice,” Guthrie said. “One of my first priorities in stepping into this role was to create forums where associates can utilize their voices to drive change and to create perspective around how VF architects our strategies moving forward.”

Guthrie encouraged broadening our perspective around what it means to bring your full self to work. By doing so, we create the opportunity for employees to contribute far beyond the roles they were hired for. “All of our stories, our histories and who we are are relevant in the workplace,” she said. “All of our skills can transfer into new spaces.”

In conversation with [Denver Post](#) reporter Elizabeth Hernandez, Guthrie shared actionable steps she’s taking to make progress in each of the three pillars VF uses to organize its global IDEA strategy: impacting culture through the associate experience, impacting consumers through VF’s global brands, and affecting society through movements and social advocacy.

On the associate side, one of Guthrie’s first actions was to re-architect the internal structures supporting IDEA work into a more integrated council instead of separate groups. This enabled leaders at the top level of the organization to take ownership in the strategy and show up as champions for the work, as well as creating connectivity with VF’s employee resource groups and giving them the opportunity to influence the strategy.

A diversity report, published externally and internally, acts as an accountability measure and gives the company valuable insight around the areas that hold the most opportunity for impact. Guthrie’s team found that their retail and distribution functions outperform on diversity metrics, so she created talent development pipelines for these groups. VF’s “Powering Potential” program offers apprenticeship rotations as “a launching ground for them to explore or unlock new potential,” she said. “We’re being really thoughtful about how to capitalize on the talent that exists already within the organization.”

When bringing in new talent, Guthrie is “focusing on areas where we have an opportunity to be part of the solution and developing new pipelines as opposed to tapping into existing pipelines.”

Design is central at VF, but BIPOC are historically underrepresented in the design world. Recognizing this spurred VF to partner with [PENSOLE Academy](#) on a training program for youth who’ve demonstrated an interest in design. “Many of us inherit the baggage of industries,” she said. “We can work harder to find high potential design talent, or we can recognize that there’s a problem across the industry and be part of that solution. That benefits us and our brands, but it also benefits the industry more broadly.”

VF’s action on the consumer and society pillars highlights the importance of listening externally too. Guthrie said portfolio company [The North Face’s Explore Fund Council](#) is a prime example.

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The council includes community leaders who gave input on developing principles of giving and guidelines for operating more inclusively. Ten percent of the [VF Foundation's](#) annual spend is also dedicated to causes that advance racial equity.

Beyond work in VF's three IDEA pillars, Guthrie emphasized the importance of earning buy-in internally to maintain the momentum for diversity and inclusion work. At VF, that starts with alignment of values. The company has also defined what inclusive leadership means for them—tying a portion of each leader's bonus to specific behaviors and outcomes that support inclusivity. "If you can't say it, then you can't do it," she said about the need for clear language around diversity.

Her advice for leaders is to take a human-centered approach and check in with your teams. Understand that fatigue is real in this work and give space for employees to express how they're feeling. "Our reality is not others' reality," she said of a simple reminder that can help leaders embrace a more inclusive mindset.

Bio

[Rachel Youngblade](#) is a Denver, CO-based writer who covers creativity, leadership, growth and human-centered design. She produces a podcast for IDEO U, the online learning arm of global design company IDEO, featuring interviews with creative leaders.