

Five Questions with Michele Sprague, DEI & Talent Development

As we honor Women's History Month as a company, we sat down with our DEI lead — Michele Sprague — to learn more about advancing diversity, equity and inclusion across Chesapeake's culture.

As a DEI & Talent Development lead (and nationally certified diversity professional), what are your priorities and primary responsibilities?

My priority is to strengthen and integrate DEI into our everyday business and culture at Chesapeake. That means that I work alongside our senior leaders to develop, implement and guide all programs and practices that support DEI. In order to achieve success in DEI, we need to set clear goals and listen to one another at all levels.

Listening well is critical to another aspect of my job — developing our internal talent. I consider it a privilege to be a resource for our employees as they seek to advance their careers. By connecting our employees to specific learning programs, we demonstrate that they are worth investing in for the growth of our company.

You're new to Chesapeake but not to the oil and gas industry. What unique challenges does the industry face when it comes to DEI?

Based on my experience, I see three primary challenges as the oil and gas industry seeks to bolster diverse hiring and more inclusive work cultures:

1. Our business is driven by where we can access our product, and sometimes small populations in these areas make diverse recruiting a challenge.
2. Like many corporate sectors, our industry has a history of white, male leadership. Today's employees need to see themselves reflected across our organizations, including in top positions.
3. Our industry has often lagged others relative to work-life integration and inclusive benefits. For example, having flexible workdays, supportive childcare options and LGBTQIA-inclusive medical benefits can create a more accepting work environment.

Identifying these challenges is a critical step in tackling them. I've seen firsthand at Chesapeake the supportive programs that a company can adopt to increase equity and create a culture where all voices have value.

Speaking of, Chesapeake has done some foundational DEI work in the past several years. What has been successful and where do we need to improve?

Our core values set the stage for DEI support. Specifically our values of respect, trust and open communication show that our culture is primed for new ideas, experiences and perspectives. I also think Chesapeake has really benefited from the fact that its top leadership believes in the importance of DEI. This has led to valuable learning opportunities at all levels and the creation of several programs that reinforce a DEI culture.

At the same time, we need to set clear objectives that can be tracked and measured, align leadership support with pay, performance and recruitment equity (with tools and coaching on how to do so), and build our DEI strategy around a systems mindset so it becomes part of our ingrained culture.



Korn Ferry in its “[Future of Work Trends of 2022](#)” report noted that research shows the benefits of diverse and inclusive teams and many organizations are committed to this, but “only 32% are purposefully creating diverse and inclusive teams to drive performance.” How will Chesapeake move the DEI dial this year?

There are two words that I have on repeat: intentionality and transparency. We’ll be intentional in our strategy, balancing our actions with listening and open communication.

This year we’re focusing on leadership alignment behaviors and actions, establishing reliable data to measure our progress, continuing our employee awareness and education efforts and identifying potential biases across the organization. Once we consistently perform in these areas, we mature our program to the next level.

What are you most excited about introducing at Chesapeake specific to DEI?

I am passionate about the DEI vision we have set for Chesapeake, which includes being a DEI leader in our industry. We have the full support of our CEO to work toward this goal.

Recently we [defined what diversity, equity and inclusion mean at Chesapeake](#) and will use these definitions as a filter for our efforts, staying true to intentionality and transparency. These definitions align our organization, helping us to better work together toward change.

Although all three concepts are important to building a diverse culture, I consider equity to be key to successful DEI efforts. I look forward to continuing our company’s education about the importance of equity — particularly recognizing that people start at different (advantaged/disadvantaged) points in life, greatly impacting their futures and careers.