

# INCLUSION IS GOOD FOR BUSINESS

## Brian Blake

Vice President of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, IGT

**PGRI INTRODUCTION:** Following a successful tenure leading Diversity and Inclusion for the National Hockey League (NHL), Brian Blake joined IGT in the spring of 2023 to run the company's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), dedicated to ensuring all IGT employees enjoy a diverse, equitable and inclusive working environment.

In his three and a half years at the NHL, Brian launched the organization's first immersive-inclusion learning experience, which was delivered to all full-time employees including the league's commissioner and senior executive team. He led and facilitated the NHL's internal inclusion steering committee, multiple enterprise-wide town halls on topics such as inclusion and social justice, and the creation of the organization's first Diversity and Inclusion Groups.

Prior to the NHL, Brian was instrumental in reenergizing DEI and learning-and-organizational development solutions at U.S.-based media company Turner (now Warner Bros. Discovery). He also served as a senior career management consultant and organizational development consultant for organizations including JPMorgan Chase and Citizens Financial Group. Brian holds a bachelor's degree in arts, political science, and philosophy from New York University, and a Juris Doctor from the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, in New York.

*In a recent conversation, Brian shared why DEI is so important to IGT and its customers, the company's progress to date, and what's next.*



**You launched the first immersive, inclusion-learning experience for the NHL— what does a program like that involve?**

**Brian Blake:** I proposed to the NHL commissioner that all of the organization's employees —about 600 people — go through two full days of an inclusion learning experience. We didn't see it as training, where you "learn A" and then go and apply it. Inclusion learning is different because there's a lot of nuance to it, a lot of heart and head. You apply self-reflection and learn new concepts, and it can take you into spaces of discomfort. What has to happen in the inclusion process is a willingness to look at yourself and question how you see the world, understand what prism you look through, how you evaluate and make decisions, what

your unconscious biases may be. The program was institutionalized and is now experienced by the league's new hires when they join.

One of the things I learned through this process was that I had forms of privilege that I hadn't recognized. Privilege is not only about the things you get, but also the things that you never have to think about or worry about — while *others do* need to think about and worry about them. Realizing this makes you more empathetic as you interact in the world. It was a game changer for me. The beauty of this work and my role now at IGT is that learning is a critical piece, and you never stop adding to your awareness. DEI is a journey — it brings in multiple practices and principles: change management, emotional intelligence, perception — it's truly a multidisciplinary field. In an organization like IGT, we are designing equipment, software, and games for diverse customers and markets

around the world. Players everywhere interact with our products. We want to be smart and inclusive and make sure we're applying that lens.

### How has your transition to IGT been, and what priorities are you focusing on as you take over from your predecessor?

The transition has been exciting and rewarding. Joining a company with the scale of IGT requires a ramp-up period, and overall, I think the transition has been smooth. For the last five-plus years, IGT has been transparent and consistent, both internally and externally, about its commitments to and achievements in DEI, which provided me with a solid foundation. The people, channels and challenges are of course different between the NHL and IGT, but in many ways, the charters are similar. At IGT, our DEI mission is to create a fair and inclusive culture that values unity, difference, equity, and belonging in our people, players, customers, and communities. To that end, research has proven time and again that companies with greater inclusion, diversity, and an environment that values difference, boast higher performance, make better decisions, innovate more frequently, and overall achieve higher employee satisfaction – these are business objectives that apply to all sectors.

My predecessor, Kim Barker Lee, did a wonderful job of building the foundation for DEI here at IGT, starting in 2018 and right through the end of 2022. In that time, IGT's Office of D&I was created – which later became the Office of DEI to reflect equity as a core factor in this work. The company launched inclusive learning to help us with language and terminology and to help each of us to start becoming inclusive leaders. IGT's Diversity and Inclusion employee Groups (DIGS) were launched – we now have seven DIGS with more on the way. The company's Global and Regional DEI Councils were launched, and IGT began participating in indexes like Bloomberg, All-In, and the Disability Equality Index, to ensure we are engaging in DEI practices that benefit multiple dimensions of diversity. We have seen Talent Management DEI Interventions and greater focus on well-being in DEI programming. And our senior executive leaders participated in an

Inclusive Leadership initiative that looked at how well they are engaging in inclusive leadership principles and how they can do so even better.

### Why are the company's DEI initiatives important to customers?

It's critical to how IGT drives results and value for customers. Data is important to us at IGT, so I'll share some data I came across recently: Research shows that more diverse organizations are 75% more likely to see ideas become products in some manner. Diverse teams, managed inclusively, are better at solving complex challenges and innovating ideas. And companies that embrace diversity and inclusion are 70% more likely to capture new markets. Our focus on DEI speaks to our mindset, to how we innovate, how well we understand players and consider the ramifications of new technologies. When a business unit is developing gaming characters, for example, and they're applying that inclusive lens and making sure we've considered how a character will resonate – I'm loving those conversations, because that tells me our people are thinking about these things, whether it's to do with how new retailers are onboarded or how we're going to face industry challenges and support our customers in facing those challenges.

Built into our DEI plan are specific metrics that are linked to business objectives. We've also established relevant benchmarks. At the recent NASPL conference, I shared with lottery customers some of the areas where we are making a measurable impact. For example, the representation of women on IGT's leadership and executive teams has increased from 24.6% six years ago to 30% this year. This is higher than the Mercer benchmark of 26%, a metric drawn from various industries and business sizes. The representation of people of color within the U.S. segment of IGT's leadership has grown to its highest level year in five years. We know we have more to do, and we're proud of the progress we have made to this point.

As we further enhance our equity programming, we will be better positioned to increase representation across IGT as a whole and in leadership ranks. The Office of DEI will be working closely with the company's talent acquisition team to

understand the gaps of underrepresented employees within the lines of business and provide guidance in recruiting with an inclusive lens by expanding where we source diverse talent, which affinity/identity organizations we build relationships with, and how we market our job openings to underrepresented candidates so that we are an employer-of-choice for all.

### What inspired the addition of Equity into the name of the office you now lead?

Equity is a critical piece of the puzzle, along with diversity and inclusion, because equity is about giving everyone the particular tools that they need to be successful. Most organizations focus on diversity first. Our philosophy is inclusion first, then equity, then diversity. To illustrate why, let's take gender diversity, for example: A company may set out to recruit and promote more women. Perhaps they'll achieve that goal and then



### IGT CEO Vince Sadusky

became signatory for the United Nations Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) and for the letter on disability inclusion, a call to action to benchmark with the Disability Equality Index (DEI)



quickly implement inclusive practices and environments. Although those steps are integral to the process, they do not ensure that equitable policies and systems are in place that will propel these employees' long-term success and help them unlock their full business potential. Equity is a vital ingredient. Equity means giving each person the unique things that they need to be successful. In the case of women, it can mean efforts to alleviate the historical and social disadvantages they have faced, such as mentorship and sponsorship initiatives that create avenues of upward growth, leadership development programs, inclusion learning experiences that help navigate bias, micro-aggressions, and gender privilege. These are examples of actions that contribute to an equitable work environment. Gender is just one example, but equity touches all dimensions of diversity in the workplace. Compensation, cultural celebrations, time zone considerations, health benefits, accessibility, an environment of psychological safety – equity considerations are vast and dynamic.

### What's new and next on the company's DEI journey?

Currently, an initiative that's critical in taking us to the next level is to focus more on IGT's People Managers to ensure that our employee population is operating with an inclusive point of view. No one has a bigger impact on corporate culture and the employee experience than People Managers, which in turn impacts how we work together, the solutions we offer, and ultimately the experience for customers and players. We know that teams managed through an inclusive lens outperform on every metric, and there's a lot of benefit to the organization and our customers in maintaining a real focus on this.

Part of our strategic DEI plan is also to elevate employees' DEI IQ, meaning they become more culturally fluent, adept at managing inclusively, and recognizing the value in peoples' differences. This year, IGT launched Ignite Inclusion, a company-wide program dedicated to thinking, behaving, and decision making through the lens of DEI. Employees dove in and examined topics such as valuing difference, unconscious bias, and navigating obstacles to inclusion. I'm looking



forward to offering more of these learning opportunities and leaning into our DEI strategic approach.

As far as we've come, our organization is continuing to strengthen our foundation. Among many initiatives, we will be leveraging our existing mentorship programs into a scalable, global program so that we have a consistent process for all to follow that can facilitate growth opportunities for all our employees. We will start this with smaller pilot programs across business and corporate units, applying successes and lessons learned, and work our way from there. And we are going to fortify our employee Diversity and Inclusion Groups (DIGs) to be even better stewards of our inclusive culture, by instituting a new governance model that will give them greater guidance and support, encourage greater intersectionality across the DIGs, and create stronger connections between the DIGs and the company's Global/Regional DEI Councils.

### In July, IGT released its 16th Sustainability Report. How does DEI tie into the company's sustainability efforts?

IGT's 2022 Sustainability Report details the actions, big and small, that IGT takes to protect its people and the planet. It's organized by the four pillars that comprise the company's Sustainable Play™ initia-

tive: Valuing and Protecting our People, Advancing Responsibility, Supporting Our Communities, and Fostering Sustainable Operations.

IGT's efforts and commitments in the DEI realm are deeply tied to Valuing and Protecting our People. Within this chapter of the Report, readers will find some of IGT's key DEI achievements for 2022, as well as insights into how IGT engages its employees and provides safe and inclusive work environments. For example, for the first time in company history, IGT was included in the Human Rights Campaign Foundation's Corporate Equality Index, which measures LGBTQ+ inclusion in the workplace. Similarly, in 2022, IGT was the first casino and gaming company to become a signatory for the UN Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), a set of principles offering guidance to businesses on how to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace, marketplace, and community.

We will continue to leverage best practices and ensure we stay on a consistent and sustainable DEI path, where the way in which we conduct our business is through that lens. I am so excited to be on this journey with everyone across our organization. My team and I could not do this work without their energy and commitment. ■



IGT's most recent Sustainability Report, as well as more information about the company's DEI programs, can be found on IGT.com.