





It was not only the comment but the hashtags that made me curious.

“Who was this company?”  
“What were they doing?”  
“Why did Forbes recognize them?”

Upon reading further, it became apparent that **BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee** was the company who had been recognized as the nation’s number **3 employer for diversity by Forbes.**

While proud to announce their Forbes status, it was the comment that followed which led me to reach out, learn more, and now share what I learned.

“And it’s even better to know that together, our people have created a workplace where every employee is valued, respected, and trusted as part of the team”

Special thanks to Leta Gibbs (Principal Consultant, Corporate Diversity Leader at BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee), author of the post and a personal friend. She provided me with direct access to Ronald Harris, Vice President, Diversity and Inclusion, BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee. As a result of interviewing him, reviewing documents and videos shared, the following four articles are featured in this month’s newsletter.



BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee, Inc., an Independent Licensee of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association

**Patricia Larkins Hicks, Ph.D.** is President & CEO, Outcomes Management Group, LTD., [www.omgknowsbest.com](http://www.omgknowsbest.com), [pathicks@omgknowsbest.com](mailto:pathicks@omgknowsbest.com), 614-750-1807

Dr. Hicks has spent twenty years engaged in designing, advocating for, and evaluating diverse and inclusive organizational cultures



**Patricia Larkins Hicks, Ph.D.**

## People Centered Leadership



Getting everyone engaged is integral to creating a diverse and inclusive culture. This happens outside of work areas—for example, break rooms, restrooms, hallways; in other words, not behind a desk.

Because Ron meets people where they are, he has a better understanding of who they are, what they value, and how best to support them.

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## Actions Match Words

“We believe in Diversity and Inclusion.  
Everyone is valued.  
Our Commitment is more than words.  
We’ve put our beliefs into action.”  
JD Hickey, MD  
President and CEO



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## Leveraging Partnerships and Models



**PARTNERSHIPS**  
WITH PURPOSE

“My son wants to move forward, he wants to go out in the world and get a job and a paycheck,” says Angela McReynolds, mother of Project SEARCH intern D’Angelo McReynolds. “This program gives him hope for the future to not be looked at differently because of his disability.”

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# 10 “Must” Do Actions



When designing a diverse and inclusive culture, make sure you implement the following 10 actions. These actions are necessary to get buy-in, support, and commitment. You will have a culture by design versus by default.

[-READ MORE-](#)

Small steps lead to  
**BIG**  
results!



## TAKE ACTION

At the end of each article, we invite you to **TAKE ACTION** toward designing, partnering, or advocating for a diverse and inclusive organization.



Let's celebrate the  
Power of WE!



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# ReachOut e-Diversity News

An Electronic Publication of the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council

February 2019 Edition | Volume 14, Issue 1

## People Centered Leadership

### Who is Ronald Harris?

**Ronald Harris** is Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion for BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee. In this role, Ronald is responsible for cultivating a corporate culture where diversity and inclusion are aligned with the company's corporate strategy and values.

He has served in various management roles at BlueCross for 30 years.

Under his leadership, the company has received many accolades.

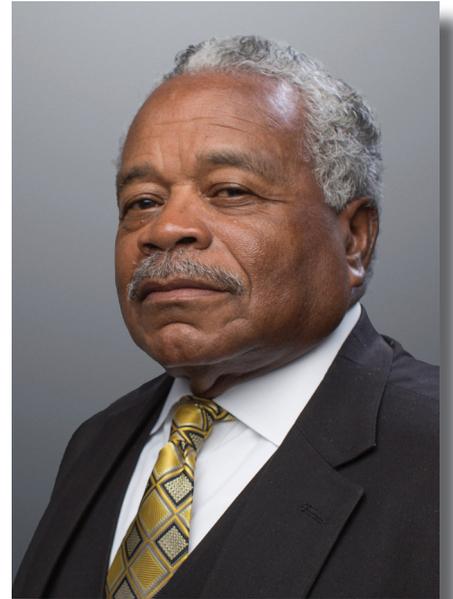
2019

Forbes nationwide ranking of BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee the No. 3 Best Employer for Diversity

2018

-Forbes recognized BlueCross as a Best Employer for Women and a Best Employer for Diversity

-BlueCross was one of 22 insurers nationwide to earn 95 out of 100 possible points on the 2018 Corporate Equality Index (CEI), a national benchmarking survey and report on corporate policies and practices relating to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) workplace equality, administered by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation.



In 2017, the National Organization for Workforce Diversity selected Ronald as a Legacy Award recipient in recognition of his significant contribution in the advancement of workforce diversity and inclusion. Legacy awards are designed to honor individuals and institutions that impact the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

## What makes Ronald Harris an effective leader?

During my interview, it became apparent that Ronald Harris is effective in his position because he is “people centered.” Regardless of what we were talking about, his response always started with how the work tied to the people the organization served and the workforce needed to know about the people they were serving so that they could best meet their needs. Never once did he start with diversity and inclusion.



### Valuing Diversity/Multiculturalism

- Hudson Institute’s “Workforce 2000” study for the U.S. Department of Labor in 1987
- **Valuing diversity:** Learning to accept and appreciate those who are different from the majority and value their contributions to the workplace

Ron’s thinking and actions had been informed by **Hudson Institute’s landmark study Workforce 2000** which ten years ago set the agenda for a new understanding of workforce issues. Described by the New York Times as “one of the most influential studies ever produced by a think tank,” this groundbreaking report set the terms for much of the policy discussion at the government and corporate levels on these issues. It was the first to call between the skills likely to be required for entry-level jobs in the future and those likely to be possessed by new entrants into the labor force.

This research influenced how Ron went about his work. As he described what he did, the following behaviors were influential in designing a diverse and inclusive culture where workers recognized the importance of understanding the people they would be serving and being equipped to serve them in a manner that would meet their needs.

## 5 Actions of an Effective Diversity and Inclusion Leader



- **Engaging with people outside the work area.** Ron believes that getting everyone engaged is integral to creating a diverse and inclusive culture. This happens outside of work areas- for example, break rooms, restrooms, hallways; in other words, not behind a desk. Ron intentionally makes sure that he is where the people are and that’s definitely outside of the C-Suite. *Because Ron meets people where they are, he has a better understanding of who they are, what they value, and how best to support them.*

- **Valuing people’s input.** One of Ron’s first actions in designing a diverse and inclusive culture was to get everyone in the organization to share their thoughts about what diversity and inclusion meant to BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee. Rather than providing a generally accepted definition, everyone’s input helped to shape and customize a definition that people at all levels could accept. Soliciting input communicated that everyone’s voice was valued. *This may have been the beginning of recognizing “working together” and the “power of we” is essential in a diverse and inclusive culture.*



- **Recognizing everyone contributes to the organization’s success.** No matter when a person joins the BlueCross BlueShield team, Ron sees them as a contributor to the organization’s success. In fact Ron says, “whenever you join the race, you can help cross the finish line.” Little did I know that Leta (the author of the LindedIn post) was still a newcomer to the organization and yet Ron was referring to her as a contributor to its success. And with that attitude, no wonder she had penned the post she did. *Sustaining successful diverse and inclusive culture requires everyone’s contribution at all times.*

- **People need to know “why.”** Ron clearly articulates that the organization exists because of its customers. He reminded me “we can’t afford to be culturally incompetent and illiterate.” This is the first of a continuous conversation that creates an urgency for everyone in the organization to understand “who” needs to be served and to make sure the organization equips its “employees” to serve them in the most appropriate manner. *When people understand “why” they are more responsive, supportive, innovative, likely to say “yes” and contribute to discovering solutions.*



- **Represent the voice of the people.** As a member of the C-Suite, Ron is at the executive leadership table. He is the voice of diversity and inclusion and uses it to help inform the organization’s menu. Ron reports directly to the President & CEO,



J.D. Hickey, MD. He participates in quarterly reviews of Divisions that focus on their performance against measurable goals. Ron also provides input to the Board as needed. His voice has been the catalyst to garnering buy-in for the diversity and inclusion business case, establishing quarterly cultural awareness sessions, establishing measurable goals that link to performance, leveraging relationships to support organizational goals, and creating a culture where people are valued, respected, and included. *Ron has not just been present. He has been vocal and influential.*

**Ronald Harris believes he will have been most effective when he has worked himself out of a job.**

“But I want the values of diversity, inclusion and cultural competency to become so deeply embedded in the everyday rhythms of how we operate that we no longer need a formal diversity program.”

**If you want additional information, CONTACT**

**Ronald Harris | Vice President, Diversity and Inclusion | BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee**  
 Office: (423)-535-7877 | 1 Cameron Hill Circle, Chattanooga, TN 37402  
 Email: [ron\\_harris@bcbst.com](mailto:ron_harris@bcbst.com)



Select 1 of the 5 people centered leadership actions and implement

and



**Let’s Celebrate the Power of We!**



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## Actions Match Words

**“We believe in Diversity and Inclusion.  
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JD Hickey, MD  
President and CEO**



### Leaders of the organization are responsible for accountability.

The leaders at BlueCross BlueShield took an important action.

- ☑ Senior Executive compensation is tied to measurable diversity and inclusion goals.

Their measurable goals focus on:

- ☑ recruitment and hiring practices,
- ☑ cultural awareness and competence,
- ☑ employee development and engagement, and
- ☑ supplier relationships and community partnerships



### Recruitment and Retention

Actions were identified that related to people who are differently abled (people with disabilities). BlueCross BlueShield actively recruits and retains people who self-identify engaging in the following actions.

- ☑ Offering facilities that include accessibility features beyond the requirements set forth in the Americans with Disabilities Act



- ✔ Ensuring recruitment personnel are formally trained on employment best practices for people who are differently abled
- ✔ Connecting with universities to encourage students who are differently abled to attend recruitment events
- ✔ Posting job openings with organizations and websites that work specifically with this community – as well as requiring non-specialized employment sourcing channels to target differently abled talent

- ✔ Inviting candidates to self-identify as differently abled and asking if a job accommodation or aide will be required
- ✔ Including accommodations for differently abled people in the company's emergency evacuation plans

### Employee Benefits

While benefits are provided to everyone, some are customized to meet the needs of specific cultural groups. The following are examples of benefits offered to employees who self-identify as LGBTQ.

- ✔ Domestic partner health care benefits for same-gender partners
- ✔ Transgender benefits, including gender reassignment surgery



**BlueCross**  
**HEALTHY**  
**PLACE**<sup>SM</sup>



“When I married my wife and changed my benefits, I received great customer service from our HR department, just like every other BlueCross employee. It was no big deal.”

Rachel Pescatore *BlueCross Enterprise Architect*



**Workforce Development**  
**BlueCross and BlueShield engages in both formal and informal actions to increase cultural awareness and competence.**

- ☑ Examples of Cultural Awareness Sessions have included:  
 Black History Month, LBGTQ Awareness, Hispanic Heritage Month, Veteran’s Day

## Upcoming Event

**"Partnering With Us - BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee Supplier Diversity Program"**

**6 MAR**

**BlueCross and Blue Shield produces regular communications and training opportunities to continue educating their employees.**

- ☑ Moving Beyond Race and Gender is an example of one training module
- ☑ Minority mentoring is provided to assist employees from minority groups in their career development

### SUPPLIER DEVELOPMENT

**BlueCross BlueShield invests in expanding its utilization of diverse suppliers.**

- ☑ \$60 million spent with small and disadvantaged businesses
- ☑ More than \$60 million spent with minority-owned companies



Select and implement 1 action you and/or your organization can take to hold leaders accountable for a diverse and inclusive culture

Select and implement 1 action that you and/or your organization can use to recruit individuals who represent un/underserved populations with disabilities

**and**



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## Leveraging Partnerships and Models

BlueCross BlueShield partners with *Hamilton County Department of Education* and leverages its relationships with the *Tennessee Department of Human Services-Vocational Rehabilitation (TDHS)* and *Siskin Hospital for Physical Rehabilitation* to implement the *Project SEARCH* model to offer internship opportunities for high school students.

Project SEARCH is designed to give young adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities valuable work experience. Originally founded by Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center, the program has since been implemented in communities across the country and around the world.

After completing high school, many young adult students with intellectual and developmental challenges end up at home and unemployed because they lack access to specialized job training resources.

**“These are high-functioning students who are aging out of many of their supportive services,” says Project SEARCH liaison Jennifer Allison, also an exceptional education lead teacher for secondary programs at HCDE.**



The Tennessee Department of Human Services-Vocational Rehabilitation (TDHS) and Siskin Hospital for Rehabilitation provided guidance to BlueCross BlueShield and HCDE in developing opportunities that account for the different needs and strengths of the Project SEARCH participants.





“We wanted to help BlueCross develop an environment where these young people can flourish and advance their skill sets while providing a truly useful service to the company,” says Tiffany Ramsey, regional supervisor with TDHS.

Prospective interns and their parents/guardians attended a series of meetings at BlueCross headquarters on Cameron Hill to learn more about the program. The chosen eight were invited to attend a Camp Work Readiness event, which included training on a variety of practical and professional skills such as reading and following a bus schedule for transportation to and from work. The group also had the opportunity to talk through different workplace scenarios and practice their business communication skills – including eye contact, greetings and the all-important handshake. At the end of camp, each intern participated in mock interviews with volunteers from BlueCross and other area businesses.



The Project SEARCH interns, all of whom are in their senior year, are scheduled to be on campus from 8 a.m.-3 p.m. every weekday, and will follow the schedule of the school year. The group starts their workdays in a classroom discussing plans for each day and working through a Project SEARCH curriculum that includes lessons on how to get and keep a job, health and wellness, technology, self-advocacy, and more.

After a two-week orientation and completion of their scheduled training, interns embark on the first of three successive 10-week internships in the company. A Project SEARCH instructor will work with each intern to learn new tasks in the various areas as the internship progresses.” They rotate through roles in different divisions – from clerical work with BlueCare Tennessee and Member Benefits Administration to facilities support with Properties and Administrative Services and custodial roles with Environmental Services.



**“Each department involved in this initiative provides a mentor – someone the Project SEARCH intern can go to with questions and rely on for support,”** says Project SEARCH’s Susie Rutkowski.



By the end of the program in May 2019, each participant will have a robust set of skills and experience to add to their resume – a resume that will hopefully help them secure a paying job in the community once the program ends

**“This is an opportunity for these interns to get a job and go on with their lives, just like their counterparts in high school are doing,”** Susie says.

Parents are optimistic about the impact the program will have on their children.

**“My son wants to move forward, he wants to go out in the world and get a job and a paycheck,”** says Angela McReynolds, mother of Project SEARCH intern D’Angelo McReynolds. **“This program gives him hope for the future to not be looked at differently because of his disability. It’s good to see kids have this support.”**

**NOTE:** This article is comprised of excerpts from an article “Ready for the real world: Project SEARCH helps students with intellectual and learning disabilities,” by Allison Sexter, Communications Specialist, corporate communication team. (August, 2018) BCBS News Center...Insights



## PARTNERSHIPS WITH PURPOSE

# TAKE ACTION

Learn more about [Project Search](#)

Select a potential partner and/or relationship your organization can leverage and develop partnership with purpose plan

Implement in partnership with another organization (s) a program that makes a difference to a specific un/underserved population with disabilities in your community

and



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## 10 Diverse and Inclusive Culture Design Must Do's

Patricia Larkins Hicks, Ph.D.

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When designing a diverse and inclusive culture, make sure you implement the following 10 actions. These actions are necessary to get buy-in, support, and commitment. You will have a culture by design versus by default.



### Gather information about the people who will benefit from your organization's work over the next 5 years

Knowing "who" you will be serving is critical to developing a people-centered business case.

### Engage stakeholders in the strategic planning process

When people are invited to participate and are involved in planning, they are more likely to take ownership and commit to its implementation.



### Define the organization's beliefs

Beliefs drive actions. Get clarity about the beliefs that are most important to your organization. Shared beliefs lead to consistent actions.

**Be intentional and disciplined**

Every day be thoughtful about the actions that need to be taken. Don't let distractions take you off course.



**Build relationships**

Results are tied to your relationships. Make sure you leverage both internal and external relationships.

**Prepare properly**

Don't jump into action. Take time to make sure you have thought about everything first.



**Work together**

When people work together, over the long term- more gets done better and faster.



**Communicate about people's needs, expectations, successes all the time**  
 Consistent communication about your stakeholders creates top of the mind awareness of their importance. This leads to people feeling valued.



**Set everyone up for success**  
 When people recognize you are interested in everyone succeeding, then they believe everyone is valued.

**Measure to ensure everyone is meeting performance expectations and results are achieved.**  
 That which gets measured gets managed and gets results



**TAKE ACTION**

**Identify the most important first step that will improve designing your diverse and inclusive culture. Then take it!**

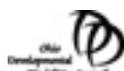
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