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Business

Top Places to Work: Diversity edition

The list is led by Commonwealth Care Alliance

By **Katie Johnston**
GLOBE STAFF

An online sports betting company might not seem the most likely employer to offer progressive gender-transition benefits, but DraftKings recently rolled out a comprehensive plan that goes above and beyond what many organizations provide. The Boston company covers medical procedures traditionally considered elective, such as vocal cord and facial feminization surgeries, and provides a concierge service to help employees navigate the process. Paid time off for these and other procedures is also covered as part of the medical leave benefit.

At a sports-focused company, it seemed especially important to take these steps to let employees and potential job candidates know the company is an open, accepting place, said chief people officer Graham Walters.

“There’s an unfortunate perception in general that sports is a place for straight, white, cisgendered, able-bodied males,” Walters said. “Our goal is to make sure that everyone feels like they belong here.”

DraftKings’ focus on making people of all ethnicities, abilities, genders, and orientations feel not just welcome but valued is one of many reasons the company made the Globe’s first-ever Top Places to Work rankings based on diversity and inclusion.

Ten companies made the final list, led by the Boston health care nonprofit Commonwealth Care Alliance, based on two sets of surveys administered by the employee research and consulting firm Energage.

Employee responses about diversity were first culled from the Globe’s 2020 Top Places to Work rankings, and 40 of the highest-scoring companies completed a second questionnaire focused solely on their dedication to making their workplaces more equitable.

The 10 winning companies actively recruit

not just Black and Latino prospects, but LGBTQ candidates and people with disabilities, as well as those with Native American and Middle Eastern heritage. Many track representation among new hires, promotions, and people who quit, and evaluate leaders based on these metrics. Some hire outside companies to conduct pay-equity audits and require extensive diversity training for everyone associated with the company.

The Springfield life insurance provider MassMutual offers paid bereavement leave to mourn the loss of anyone an employee considers a loved one. HubSpot, a Cambridge marketing software company, holds an annual First-Gens in Tech event to recruit candidates who might not traditionally be part of the technology world, including people who were the first in their family to be born in the United States or to get a college degree.

Commonwealth Care Alliance, the top-ranked organization, which serves people with significant medical, behavioral health, and social needs, is in the process of examining nearly every aspect of its operation to support a broader range of employees. A “Top 20” list of high-potential women and people of color on staff will receive extra mentoring and professional development. Hiring teams will soon be required to be diverse, both demographically and departmentally, and to watch a video about bias before each interview. The nonprofit is also partnering with organizations such as the National Society of Hispanic MBAs to open up new networking and recruiting opportunities.

Even questions asked in interviews are being put under a microscope.

“Hiring managers have to reflect on the biases they bring to the interview table when considering candidates. It could be that they favor people from certain schools or professional affiliations,” said Donna Grici, senior vice president of talent development and culture, who has put many of these changes in motion since joining Commonwealth Care

The top ten

- 1 Commonwealth Care Alliance**
Health care nonprofit, based in Boston
1,500 employees in Mass.
- 2 Accenture**
Professional services, based in New York
1,500 employees in Mass.
- 3 MassMutual**
Life insurance, based in Springfield
4,000 employees in Mass.
- 4 Slalom**
Consulting, based in Seattle
470 employees in Mass.
- 5 Nuance Communications**
AI speech-recognition software, based in Burlington
825 employees in Mass.
- 6 HubSpot**
Marketing software, based in Cambridge
1,800 employees in Mass.
- 7 Visiting Angels Newton/Canton**
Senior home care, based in Newton
130 employees in Mass.
- 8 Justice Resource Institute,**
Human and social services, based in Needham
2,500 employees in Mass.
- 9 Akamai Technologies**
Internet delivery and security network,
based in Cambridge
1,800 employees in Mass.
- 10 DraftKings**
Online sports betting, based in Boston
950 employees in Mass.

Alliance a year ago. “There’s bias associated with almost every decision we make.”

Employers’ attention to diversity has grown over the years, said Su Joun, who heads Diversity@Workplace Consulting Group in Cambridge. Twenty years ago, diversity meant showing appreciation for employees’ differences by holding multicultural potluck lunches, Joun said. More recently, companies have been seeking to open their doors wider to people from different backgrounds. And in the past year, racial justice and mental health became a

focus as awareness of systemic racism grew and the pandemic ravaged communities of color.

It used to be passive, she said: "We have no problems with diverse talent, and if they come to us, fabulous, we would never turn them away." Now, it's like, "Where can we actively find them?"

Still, Joun said, there's a long way to go. Once companies find diverse talent, they need to follow through to support, leverage, and promote them once they're onboard.

Company leaders need to be held accountable for how much, or how little, their employee populations have shifted demographically, especially in management positions.

Women and people of color also need more opportunities to advance, she said, and the concept of leadership must evolve beyond "extroverted, tall, thin, able-bodied, white males."

"When we say we want diverse talent," she said, "a lot of times what we're saying is we want someone who walks, talks, e-mails, acts, does meetings just like us, but in different colors."

Expanding efforts to educate staff has been a focus at several companies.

Justice Resource Institute, a human services provider for people with severe developmental delays and youth struggling with mental illness or trauma, is developing a three-part series that delves into the causes and history of racism. The organization's leaders will be required to watch a documentary called "Crack-

ing the Codes: The System of Racial Inequity," followed by a facilitated discussion; learn about the impact of racism in the United States; and participate in an exercise that examines privilege and oppression in their own lives.

"We have to have staff that are not just informed but are living and breathing diversity, equity, and inclusion," said vice president Dani Silcox, "because that's how they're going to be able to provide the best service for the very diverse clients that we serve."

At Akamai Technologies, the quest to improve diversity goes all the way up to the board of directors. The Cambridge Internet delivery and security network has started providing its board with training materials used by the rest of the staff, including research about the prehistoric roots of inclusion, when being part of a tribe was necessary to survive. This same urge exists at the workplace today, said Khalil Smith, vice president of inclusion, diversity, and engagement. "Before it was, 'I wasn't part of the hunt or I didn't get to share in the food.' Now it's, 'I wasn't copied on that e-mail.'"

Giving the directors access to these materials allows them to better hold leadership accountable, Smith said: "Is this really something that we're driving through the organization . . . or is this a check-the-box?"

Some organizations are taking their efforts

beyond employees.

Last fall, the professional services company Accenture launched a program to invest in Black tech entrepreneurs. In a number of cities, including Boston, Accenture Ventures and the company's African American employee resource groups are reaching out to Black-owned startups, as well as to clients and partners that can support them.

The company is always looking for enterprise software startups to invest in, especially those that can benefit its clients, said Kathryn Ross, who runs the program. But it's also a way to help lift up Black company founders, who get only 1 percent of venture capital funding, according to a 2015 CB Insights report.

"That's a shocking number to me," Ross said. "We want to do our part to change that."

The thing about improving diversity is that it's never-ending, said Joun. Awareness may evolve, but inequities are embedded so deeply in our workplaces that it takes a continual effort to change them.

"Increasing diversity is going against the grain of the systemic norms, so if you stop you go backward," she said. "It needs a constant, vigilant push forward."

Katie Johnston can be reached at katie.johnston@globe.com.