

A close-up portrait of Ericka DeBruce, a woman with short dark hair, wearing glasses and a red top. She is smiling warmly. The background behind her is a blue and white geometric pattern.

Expert view

Q&A with Ericka DeBruce, VP of Engagement, Inclusion and Social Responsibility, Sedgwick

The “Expert view” column presents a wide range of topics offering valuable insights and information for customers.

edge:

What are you working on right now that will have an impact on our customers in the near future?

Ericka:

Sedgwick customers look to us for leading-edge ways to manage risk, administer benefits, leverage technology, and take care of their people. Cultivating our diversity, inclusion and engagement is key to our ability to deliver more innovative services and to go the extra mile for our customers.

A big part of my role is leading Sedgwick's efforts to foster a culture of belonging because it is that kind of environment that allows for dissenting opinions—what's commonly called "diversity of thought." There is a common misconception that having a diverse organization automatically results in diversity of thought. However, if employees feel there are negative ramifications for voicing differing opinions—such as not getting promoted or being viewed as disagreeable or an outsider—they will suppress their creativity and follow the status quo.

That's where inclusion comes into play. In cultures of belonging, organizations embrace differences and are well-positioned to capitalize on their employees' unique talents and ideas. Inclusion and belonging, combined with diversity, are what drive innovation.

A culture of belonging also drives employee engagement, which is the other important piece of the puzzle. Engaged employees who feel valued for their uniqueness go above and beyond what is minimally required of them. This is known as discretionary effort and at the heart of our **caring counts** philosophy.

edge:

Are there areas that Sedgwick is enhancing or changing to respond to trends we are seeing with our customers and in the industry?

Ericka:

One troubling trend on which we're very focused is the general lack of interest in entering the risk and benefits field. As our customers' needs in these areas grow more complex, our industry is facing a serious sustainability crisis.

At Sedgwick, we are committed to finding eager, new talent to join our ranks to ensure we can maintain our competitive edge and serve the needs of our customers long into the future. As many industry veterans move toward retirement and recent high school and college graduates gravitate toward the tech sector and other fields, we must find creative ways to attract and retain talent and diversify the kinds of people interested in fulfilling careers with us.

To that end, Sedgwick has teamed up with *Business Insurance* as a founding partner of its Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Institute, which works to identify perceived and actual barriers to D&I in our industry and develop strategies for sustainability. Together with

our customers and industry partners, we're working to spark interest among all kinds of people in doing the work that we do. An industry organization like this certainly yields indirect benefits for us, but our hope is also that communicating Sedgwick's employer brand and employee value proposition through the institute will help us attract untapped talent.

Another trend that is significant for our business is the increasing diversification of our customer and consumer population in line with the changing demographics of our nation as a whole. The American workforce includes more and more women, people of color and individuals for whom English is not a primary language. Additionally, varying family structures impact how we administer benefits on behalf of our customers.

Our response to this trend includes a renewed focus on diversity recruiting and a greater emphasis on delivering culturally congruent care. These tactics enable us to more closely mirror the populations we serve, and provide appropriate care in accordance with the values, beliefs and lifestyles of our consumers. An obvious example of culturally congruent care is the ability to speak to people in their native

language. We've achieved great success with our bilingual claims teams advocating for Spanish-speaking consumers and we're working to incorporate other languages into our repertoire. As Managing Director Jay Ayala wrote in a blog article on the [Sedgwick Connection](#):

"Our ability to communicate in a native language is a critical tool for gaining the trust of injured employees for whom English is a second language. Additionally, it is just as important that we understand how differences in culture and values affect perceptions and play a vital role in claim resolution. Removing language-related and cultural barriers reduces friction in the system."

In order to provide culturally congruent care and practice empathy, you have to understand the people you're caring for and where they come from. For example, in the U.S.,

when someone passes away, our standard response is "I'm sorry for your loss." In other cultures, that can be perceived as apologizing for something inevitable or meant to be, or even a denial of the afterlife. It's important for our colleagues to realize that the cultural lens through which they view the world may not be the same as that of the people they're caring for. Our goal is to position our colleagues to deliver culturally congruent care and to approach the service experience from others' points of view.

edge:
What is your vision for D&I at Sedgwick?

Ericka:
Our long-term vision is for Sedgwick to not just reflect but lead our industry and the communities we serve in demographic diversity and how we engage colleagues, consumers and customers.

Demonstrating **caring counts** means going beyond the superficial and treating the whole person. To do that, we have to treat our colleagues in a holistic way as well, and that means understanding their uniqueness and what they bring to the Sedgwick organization.

My challenge is bringing the D&I concept down from a lofty goal into tangible actions. That can be achieved by focusing on attitudes and behaviors; it's less about what we do and more about how we do it. My job is to lead the change we want to see in our industry and ensure that our colleagues know exactly how to drive the results we're aiming for.

RESOURCE

Sedgwick's diversity and inclusion video, **Differences Matter**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NpuT3J3WPts>

ERICKA DEBRUCE

As Sedgwick's vice president of engagement, inclusion and social responsibility, Ericka DeBruce focuses on organizational initiatives that support the company's commitment to diversity and inclusion (D&I) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) and strengthen its culture of workplace and community engagement. She brings to her position a wealth of experience and genuine passion for inclusive and engaged organizational cultures. Previously DeBruce served as global diversity and inclusion manager for International Paper and held diversity leadership roles at Talbots, American Cancer Society, American Red Cross and BAE Systems. She earned a bachelor's degree from Bradley University and the Strategic Diversity and Inclusion Management certification from Georgetown University. DeBruce is an advisory board member for the Business Insurance D&I Institute's [inaugural conference](#), which will be held in Chicago Sept. 28-29, 2016.