



Senior-Level Diversity & Inclusion Search for Manufacturing Co. Produces Next-Phase Leader



Objective: Diversity & Inclusion as a Foundation, Not a Program

J.M. Huber Corporation (Huber) is a 135-plus-year-old company that remains family-owned and operated, innovating and manufacturing consumer and industrial products to improve people's lives. Huber has a focused company culture that revolves around a set of guiding principles as a way of life, one of which is "Respect for People," specifically including a strong commitment to Diversity and Inclusion. This drive is not a new concept for the company or a lip service reaction but rather a natural extension of the values they have always held. In 1920, preceding the Civil Rights movement, the company owner took a stand on providing housing and equal pay for black and white employees alike, even when a group of locals staged a protest in front of his plant. 100 years later in 2020, preceding the current upswell of racial injustice and intolerance awareness, the company saw it was crucial to step up the progression of their Diversity and Inclusion strategy and set their "I Belong at Huber" approach for helping every employee feel a sense of belonging.

Challenges of this search:

- All-virtual process during the pandemic, plus general uncertainty and racial tensions around the world
- In-demand, sensitive nature of Diversity & Inclusion
- Finding candidates who felt a calling to leave a legacy, not just fill the role

To further intensify their commitment and take Diversity and Inclusion to the next level, however, they required someone with extensive expertise and demonstrated success. Executive VP/Chief HR Officer Lily Prost is a longtime client of Bell Oaks and reached out to the firm to launch the search for a new Director of Organizational Development. She felt confident in Bell Oaks' experience with Diversity and Inclusion talent searches and their ability to execute it virtually in the beginning of shelter-in-place during the pandemic.

Shortly after the search began, racial tensions and equality disparity came to even more of a head worldwide. The hurdles of finding just the right person for this role at Huber became even bigger and more urgent, as uncomfortable and courageous conversations needed to take place to increase the understanding for creating an inclusive workplace. Even with the obvious challenges of virtual searching and hiring during the pandemic and with people generally less likely to make career or location changes due to overarching uncertainties, Diversity and Inclusion is still an in-demand field and became even more so once many companies began having these conversations on a grander scale. However, Huber needed someone who wasn't just passionate and practiced in this realm but a true talent whose aspiration was to do this work and only this work, who would stick with it and leave a legacy rather than viewing it as a stepping stone. Lily says, "Even though Diversity and Inclusion is not a program to Huber but how we want everyone to behave, there are still many complex nuances needed to fully embed it into any company's DNA. The right candidate had to see it as a corporate responsibility internally within Huber and externally in how we view our brand in the community."





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Process: “Virtually” Seamless in Spite of Challenges

Bell Oaks Partner Todd Warshaw and the team set out to methodically find and interview multiple candidates, focusing on Atlanta with a plan to go national if needed. Although many candidates are theoretically available in this field, it didn't necessarily mean Huber just had the pick of the litter, especially with their stringent criteria and the fact that many companies are looking to fill these roles at a senior level. Diversity and Inclusion means different things to different companies and locations, and it doesn't look the same in the corporate office as it does the factory floor; Huber is a global company with all of these perspectives at play. The Bell Oaks team approached the search thoughtfully and intentionally to narrow down the slate to only those candidates who possessed the long-term vision and dedication required to back up their qualifications, with a thorough understanding of Diversity and Inclusion applications in the manufacturing industry.

All interviews were conducted virtually, whereas Huber would usually want to meet people in person, particularly for such a sensitive role. Access to Bell Oaks' sophisticated CRM system – which is standard for all clients and especially helpful during this all-virtual process – kept Lily updated in real time and generated regular reports so there was never a question of status.

Bell Oaks' CRM system allows clients to see:

- The pipeline as it is updated
- Candidate resumes and interviews
- Outlines of pros and cons
- The ability to comment whether one prefers to decline a candidate or ask the team to further probe certain areas

They also engaged in weekly calls and kept her filled in on what was happening in the marketplace. “Todd and the Bell Oaks team consistently do their homework to understand our needs. They know the competencies I'm looking for and how to find people who will mesh well with my expectations and standards and within our specific culture,” says Lily. “They continue to invest in client technology so that we and candidates are kept in the loop, and they ensured that working virtually didn't jeopardize the quality of the interview process.”

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Results: Director Who Truly Belongs & Helps Others Feel the Same

It quickly became apparent that, while several candidates stood out and one came in a very close second, the first candidate they found in Atlanta continually rose to the top with her 20-plus years in Diversity and Inclusion – before it was popular – with a globally-minded skillset from work outside the US, while many other candidates were domestically-focused. Todd was able to represent Huber’s unique environment and mission so authentically that, even with other choices available to her, she could see what a valuable opportunity it was to leave her current employment and join the Huber team to spearhead the next chapter of development. Once the selection was made, he gauged her comfort level and Lily’s to make sure the pace matched where they were and managed expectations on the transition.

“At the end of the day, it is critical to Huber that everyone feels included and invited into the environment we work in – when we walk through the door, we’re not pretending to be someone else just to fit in but actually belong,” says Lily. “The outcome of this search is that Bell Oaks not only found the best candidate for the position but also someone who has the capability and experience to take our Diversity and Inclusion maturity successfully to the next level. She can train people on how to have difficult dialogues in ways where they feel safe and comfortable, as well as taking individual responsibility to understand and leverage our differences. She can spread her wings here and leave a lasting mark that ripples outward.”



“The Bell Oaks team found the perfect candidate to fill our critical senior-level Diversity and Inclusion role and further build up our strategic commitment to this foundational aspect of our company – and they did it seamlessly, even at the heights of the pandemic.

Every time we’ve consulted them as our search partner, they’ve transparently and accurately represented our culture while sourcing only the most talented people, and we are so pleased with how they understand us, who they chose, and what is to come.”

- Lily Prost, Executive VP & Chief HR Officer, J.M. Huber Corporation

