

CULTURE OF INNOVATION REAPS REWARDS FOR SEI

Colleen Stratton, Global Leader, Workforce Development at **SEI**, talks to **Tom Burroughes**, *WealthBriefing* Group Editor, on the company's leadership in its space.



Colleen Stratton
Global Leader, Workforce
Development, SEI

Please tell us how your firm advances causes such as neurodiversity, leadership, and what sets it apart?

SEI's foundation has always been about a culture of promoting new ideas and nurturing innovation. We believe the best way to continue building upon our culture is to bring together people with diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences to challenge the way we think about everything.

Within SEI, we created several programmes that tap into non-traditional hires, find fresh perspectives and ideas, and discover new skills. These include our Neurodiversity@Work Program, a nationally recognised effort to provide internship and employment opportunities to neurodiverse individuals; our "Get, Grow, Keep" global initiative, which focuses on developing clear paths for women to advance within our company; and our Female Advisor Community, which supports the advancement of women in the advisor profession. All of these programmes foster opportunities for us to pause and reflect on our communication processes and how we position people for success.

Please describe the challenges you needed to surmount to develop and grow your initiatives?

When first implementing our Neurodiversity@Work programme, it was crucial to gain buy-in from our current employees, particularly the managers who would be working with the neurodiverse individuals. While we received overwhelming support and excitement for the programme, there was some anxiety regarding the unknowns of what it might look like to support and manage a neurodiverse individual.

Like every neurotypical employee, neurodiverse employees have their own sets of strengths, along with their own challenges. In the neurodiverse community, these challenges may include sound or light sensitivity, thus the need to wear headphones or sunglasses at work. While this behaviour might not be considered "normal" in the conventional workplace, it was our job to get managers comfortable with not only accepting, but also encouraging, accommodations like this to make their interns comfortable at work. This actually turned into a real positive for our company, encouraging all leaders to evaluate the needs of their employees, regardless of their disclosure as neurodiverse or not.

Describe how you have managed to encourage colleagues to support and drive forward what initiatives you've created in this space.

Our programs have massive support globally from colleagues. Each initiative has an executive sponsor that is part of the programme, enabling us to quickly progress these programmes. We regularly provide opportunities for other employees who want to be part of these initiatives. We hold in-person sessions to discuss our programmes' goals and success, as well as areas in which we can evolve.

Looking ahead, where do you see the trend of such advancement for women in the workplace ideas going over the next five to 10 years?

Prior to the pandemic, female colleagues in our U.K. office were spending upwards of eight to 12 hours commuting each week. One reason we saw that women weren't applying for higher-level positions was due to the additional time commitment. With today's hybrid work model, those in global offices with longer commutes have the flexibility to apply for more senior roles. The pandemic has re-defined the future of work since people now demand and expect more flexibility - and that will likely continue for the next decade.

We also have a responsibility to develop the next generation of the workforce. One of our programmes supports sixth-to eighth-grade girls in exploring their interests in technology for potential careers. As an organisation, we want to influence and make an impact on the younger generation and deliver on our promise of building brave futuresSM.

How do you hope receiving this award will affect your business and the views of prospective clients?

This award reinforces our commitment to making an impact through our programmes and initiatives. We hope that more individuals are encouraged to be part of these programmes as we carry out our mission to build brave futures through the power of connection. ■