

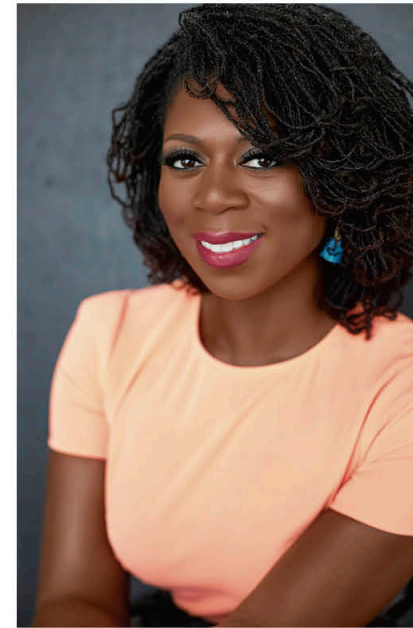
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## March 10 – March 23, 2022 Vol.44 No.21

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# Redefining Leadership



NAKI OSUTEI

Naki Osutei is redefining leadership. As the Vice President, Canadian Personal Banking Strategy, Colleague Experience, ESG at TD Bank Group (TD), she is actively collaborating with colleagues to foster a more inclusive culture for everyone.

Critical to Osutei's success at TD is her prior work in not-for-profit and broader public sector organizations. "I came to TD with a very non-traditional banking background, which has some advantages," she says. "Throughout my career, I spent a lot of time working with leaders of various kinds and at various levels thinking through complicated problems, learning how to bring people together to address challenges, and understanding what motivates people. I believe this mix of skills has been helpful in my current role."

Read our conversation with Naki as she shares her thoughts on the importance of addressing disparities within an organization and the definite steps TD is taking to help create a more equitable future for Black colleagues, communities, and those they serve.

### What does it mean to you to be a leader at a transformative time like this?

My views on leadership are evolving. Perhaps the way we need to be thinking about leadership is more as a verb, not a noun. I am demonstrating leadership as opposed to I am a leader. When George Floyd was murdered, I remember being in a meeting and the conversation was pretty casual relative to the gravity of the event that had just occurred. The isolation I experienced in that moment was monumental. I remember thinking that day, I can't let this happen again. There's an opportunity for me to demonstrate the leadership I want to see. So, I wrote a blog piece for the Black Employee Network. Although the Network is open to everyone and there are great allies who are a part of it, I was really speaking to the Black employees. I articulated the grief that I was experiencing – the experience of watching someone who looks like our brother, father or spouse being killed. I spoke from the heart and posted it. I felt relief just sharing my thoughts, but for thousands of employees across the bank, it was as if someone had seen them. Leadership is about being of service, and during these transformative times there have been many opportunities to do so, which I do my best to embrace.

### What kind of changes or difference has the Black Employee Network made for TD employees?

The TD Black Employee Network (BEN) began as a way to build community amongst Black employees in the bank. It is important to have a community of people who can support your career ambitions, who can celebrate with you, and with whom you can share experiences. The Network has a number of pillars, one of which is Employee Engagement which facilitates opportunities for employees to build deeper connections to the Bank while also creating spaces to share professional experiences including what can sometimes be difficult or sensitive conversations. The second is Professional Development and is centered around supporting each other in achieving our professional goals at TD and includes a brilliant mentorship program called *Each One Teach One* and the third is the Community Leadership which is about building channels for BEN members to make meaningful contributions to the communities around us.

What my co-chair, Peter Robinson and I hear from Black employees and allies across the bank is that while we always have more work to do to build a more inclusive, diverse and equitable organization, the presence of BEN is an important, affirming space needed as we move forward.

### Why is it imperative to prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion at any corporation, and specifically within the banking and financial industry?

I appreciate that you said diversity, equity and inclusion because, for a long time, corporations have been fixated on diversity and inclusion, but equity is really about addressing disproportionality and disparities. We understand that we must be reflective of the communities that we operate in at all levels within the organization. If a company is not focused on equity, with diversity and inclusion as part of that strategy, then it becomes easier to ignore the systemic factors that create barriers and as a result hinder the equal representation that all of us should strive to achieve.

### How is TD doing more to drive for positive, sustainable change for Black customers?

Last year, we launched the Black Customer Experience Strategy and I'm proud that TD did this. My colleague, Al Ramsay, who did such an amazing job with a similar strategy for the LGBTQ+ community, is leading the charge on this as well.

Al and his team took a research-based approach and the insights helped formulate the new strategy. Among many insights, the research revealed that banks are not always viewed as trustworthy institutions among members of Black communities, so TD's goal is to build better, more human connections with customers, especially Black customers. A key part of the strategy also included a Black Customer Experience website, so customers can access resources designed for their specific needs.

One of the key differentiators of this approach is that Al and his team go out and meet with community leaders and members thereby bringing the bank directly to the communities, and a lot of the groundwork is actually done through meeting community organizations that are immersed in the everyday lives of the people they serve.

Another invaluable resource that TD provides is access to the Black Opportunity Fund (BOF). We worked with the Fund last year and made a \$10 million investment to help support Black entrepreneurs and not-for-profit organizations, and not just with financial resources but with other types of support as well, like human resources.


One of the key aspects of this relationship for TD was that we wanted to ensure that we weren't leaving learning on the table. It was essential to us that we created open channels for dialogue about financial and economic inclusion and an understanding of the experiences Black communities across the country have had. We emphasized that sharing those learnings with TD are essential to help TD continue to develop our communication and customer service strategies.

### One final question. February was Black History Month. As you reflect on the past month, what shifts have you seen recently?

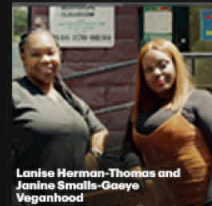
There are many shifts happening in the way Black History Month is being celebrated across Canada. In years past, focus was put on filling gaps in our collective understanding of the contributions Black people have made towards societal progress. That thread continues today but, in recent years, we've seen more Canadian narratives (versus predominantly American narratives). There are two additional shifts I've noticed in the last few years. First, is a greater emphasis on recognizing people making history today – celebrating the present and secondly, more open discussions exploring how we – Black communities and allies – can imagine and build a more inclusive and equitable future.

This year I was left feeling joyful and optimistic following our final internal event TD hosted called *Black Joy*. It was a reminder that even as we take action to push progress forward, we must make time to celebrate Black love, beauty and culture – past, present and future.

Let's walk the walk.




Chisamenem Chigbo  
TD Scholarship for  
Community Leadership Recipient



Lanise Herman-Thomas and  
Jamies Smalls-Gooye  
Veganothood

Black History Month and beyond.



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