

First Friday Five: Brickson Diamond

For today's First Friday Five, [Stanton Blackwell's](#) Head of People Success Practice [Bill Fahey](#), talks with [Brickson Diamond](#), CEO of [Big Answers](#), LLC, which consults on diversity and inclusion strategy for clients in entertainment, technology, asset management and philanthropy, with a focus on generating new partnerships and leveraging impactful connections. [Bill](#) Zoomed with [Brickson](#) to talk about the future of work, DEI and the one question he wishes he would get asked more often.

What does the workplace of the future look like to you?

The non-manufacturing workplace of the future looks remarkably different from what we experienced as the norm just eight months ago. The footprint of the traditional office will be significantly smaller since the myth of "having to sit side-by-side all day in order to do this job" has been debunked. It reminds me of the days of transition from business dress to permanent corporate casual. Remember when that seemed revolutionary in sectors like investment banking?

The physical office model that comes to mind for me is the "hoteling" structure that many consulting firms have used for years. Workers will continue to largely be remote but will be able to drop into the office as needed. We can all learn a lot from the mega-consulting firms.

What changes will leaders need to make in order to be successful in this environment?

Luckily, we have all had a crash course in this new way of working. Leaders will have to continue to innovate and flex around what it means to be engaged. When I say "engaged" I am thinking about a bi-directional phenomenon.

The Job of Workers:

There is the traditional command and control concept of keeping an eye on people. That has gone away for all but the most trackable kinds of jobs like call centers. Research shows that employees are actually getting the short end of the stick in terms of hours spent on the job now that they are working from home.

The Job of Leaders:

Because of this, leaders have to ensure that workers know they are trusted and valued. Leaders have to create and respect boundaries. The most talented and valued workers are simply going to do too much for too many hours. The last thing they need is a boss looking over their shoulder.

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Creating Harmony:

By contrast, the most effective leaders will create environments that encourage boundaries, breaks and opportunities for bursts of creativity and collaboration. Finding a rhythm for when teams connect and building a culture of connectedness fostered within those moments are jobs that fall on leaders.

What impacts will the workplace of the future have on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion?

This is an area that seriously concerns me. I imagine something is at risk of being lost in the mostly remote workplace of the future.

We work best with those we know and trust. I always marveled at the unlikely relationships that were fostered when people were randomly assigned to sit side-by-side in a cubicle farm or in a commuter van pool. Deep relational connections could result from serendipitous co-location.

In the absence of being together for eight or more hours a day we have to find new ways to make sure people feel included and a part of something.

Inclusion is my first concern. Who fails to connect deeply with the effort/organization, regardless of how they identify, when the natural bonds of proximity are gone?

Equity is next on my list of worries. We know from broad research that economic rewards are not evenly distributed. Even once the education of our children returns to formal school environments, those in disadvantaged groups will have a hard time shouldering the burden of financially supporting your business from their kitchen table. Not to mention the gender inequities that have run rampant during the days of the pandemic. The effects will be long-lasting.

Finally, there is the issue of diversity. In this one area I believe there is room for optimism. Location, distance and a number of superficial barriers can be broken down in a remote workplace of the future. A broader cross-section of people could have access to a wider array of roles. This is especially true in the world of tech.

The Bay Area, for example, is notoriously tough for Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) workers. From cost of living to a lack of accessible diverse communities, it is a geography that just doesn't work for a lot of people. It is a win for companies and talent if someone can remain in their role or even find a new career in tech from a city or region that nurtures them more fully. Then the job of engaging these employees is less about overcoming the barriers of a Redwood City-type location and more about connection, creativity and harmony.

What priority shifts have you, or are you making to ensure operation excellence in the workplace of the future?

Through my firm, Big Answers, we are doing a lot more work around coaching leaders in diversity, equity and inclusion within the context of the immediate shift to work-from-home. Even more significant has been enabling leaders to manage the repeated flares of crisis that we experience as a society on an ongoing basis.

What is one question you wish people would ask you, but don't? What would your answer be?

When is it too early to meaningfully reward job performance/career success (i.e. pay the big bucks)?

It's never too early. Looking back over the careers of most of my contemporaries from Harvard Business School, I can deliver a pile of stories about how most of us got short-changed financially. Most often we were told that despite our exceptional performance, we were too young to earn that much money. Wrong! Pay people fairly when they achieve outsized success, especially BIPOC employees. It changes the trajectory of their lives and the lives of those they support.

One caveat: I have replied with a complete Gen X focus (chip on shoulder acknowledged). If we shift to Millennials, the call becomes even more urgent. Pay them now or they will leave you for someone who will.



Brickson Diamond has dedicated his career to the cause of advancing opportunity and access for those who should have it, but do not. He has and continues to build and transform businesses across industries including entertainment, investment management and non-profits.

Diamond is CEO of Big Answers, LLC., a consulting firm founded in 2018. It helps organizations in entertainment, technology, asset management and philanthropy build and implement diversity and inclusion strategy and governance excellence. Big Answers aids client organizations in shifting culture to increase inclusion, sources senior-level diverse talent and supports the refinement of governance practices. Big Answers generates new partnerships and leverages impactful connections in order to successfully execute its clients' objectives.

Diamond is a co-founder and chair of the board of [The Blackhouse Foundation](#). Established in 2006, Blackhouse is renowned for expanding access to acquisition-focused film festivals and advancing the development of commercially viable careers across platforms for Black independent filmmakers and content creators.

He began his career with a 15-year tenure at the \$2 trillion [Capital Group Companies](#). His principal contribution to the firm was building and running a \$1.2 billion practice selling to and supporting US-based investment management consultants that serve high net worth and institutional clients.

Diamond served as Executive Vice President, Chief Operating Officer of [The Executive Leadership Council, Inc.](#) (ELC) from 2012 until 2017. The ELC is a +30 year-old global membership organization comprised of over 800 current and former Black board members, CEOs and senior executives at Fortune 1000/Global 500 companies. He was responsible for the doubling of its membership over the course of those years. Beyond recruiting new members and engaging existing members and corporate partners, Diamond led the team responsible for creating programs to develop talent across tenure and professional attainment levels through the work of The ELC's Institute for Leadership Development & Research. Diamond is a member of the boards of trustees of Brown University, [Tides](#) and the [Middlesex School](#). He serves on the investment committee of the [Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands](#). He speaks nationally on the topics of inclusion, leadership, philanthropy and fundraising. Diamond is a graduate of Brown University and Harvard Business School.