

NORDSTROM

Women Empowered Panel with Teri Bariquit, Chief Merchandising Officer

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Our Chief Merchandising Officer Teri Bariquit recently joined Footwear News for their Women Empowered virtual roundtable to discuss leadership, fashion and diversity. Below are some highlights from the conversation.

What have you learned about yourself and leadership throughout the COVID-19 crisis?

These times have been super challenging especially with the blending of our homes and offices. It's important to set boundaries and shut work off, especially in a crisis when there is so much to get done. It's vital to take care of yourself so you have the energy and clear-mindedness to get through it all. For me, that means getting physical activity and sleep in each day.

We're going through a pandemic, an economic crisis and long-overdue civil rights movement that is all compounded by other concerns like the global warming crisis —and it's all hitting at once. Being mindful of that and how you're navigating through that is important.

In leading through this, you have to find a balance between confronting hard realities and remaining hopeful and focused on the path forward. That requires being ok with letting go of some control so that you can move with speed and flexibility. It also requires listening to our people to understand where they're at emotionally and energetically.

What is Nordstrom doing to address diversity and inequality?

We've been on a journey for quite some time to improve diversity, inclusion and belonging —but we know we still have a lot of work to do. [We've made strides](#) in recruiting diverse candidates over the past 30 years, increasing our representation of people of color to 53% of all employees in 2019. I'm also proud of our board composition in that roughly 50% are women and 30% are Black women, but there is so much more to do.

We have an employee resource group called the Black Employee Network that is available as a resource for employees, to provide support, share experiences and provide input on how we can be better, but it's not enough. It's up to me as a leader to lean into the conversations, educate myself, realize my own and callout others' biases and drive this movement forward. For this to be lasting change, it can't be an HR thing or the responsibility of our Black employees —it must be a responsibility of all leaders.

We're having courageous conversations with our employees about their experiences, working on educating our people through various trainings, reaffirming our commitment to diversity in hiring and more. We've taken a public stance on this issue but know it can't be a one and done. We must continue this conversation, and we have to explore the ways we show up, ensuring we offer a diverse array of products and supplier base. At the end of the day, we have a responsibility to serve a diverse customer base with the most relevant products and that means we must do more exploration to identify a more diverse range of products.

As an individual, the thing that really cut through to my heart is that as a mother of two sons, I don't worry about them going to the store at 6pm at night. But to hear from friends the fear they have every day has stirred me in a way that brought a stronger passion to the forefront that things must change.

How do you feel about the commitment to buy from Black-owned brands?

I've been asked a lot about the 15% commitment. I don't know if that should be 15%, 10%, 32% or something else for us, because what I want to do is explore and uncover brands owned by people of color that serve our customer with the authenticity and integrity that is consistent with our own approach. I don't want to check a box —I want to ensure it's something we can stand behind and not just be a part of a moment.

Some of the things we're looking to do is start with pop-ups or discovery —maybe it's online or just a few stores. We're going to explore what will work and what will have staying power. The worst thing we could do is give a company a shot without real support or genuine commitment.

It's also not just Black-owned brands. We're looking at Black designers, suppliers, etc. to truly widen the scope. We've had a Supplier Diversity program in place for a number of years to provide opportunities for companies owned by those who are underrepresented, including Black-owned businesses, but we're currently addressing opportunities to be a better partner to these businesses along with other updates to the program.

No matter what we do, we need to make a commitment to their success —from new Black-owned brands to new Black employees. We must act with intentional thought and sincerity versus simply meeting a number.

What's been your approach to stores and operations moving forward in response to COVID-19?

From day one, we got thrown into this virtual world. The situation is very dynamic, and we have to watch it very closely. It really can't be said enough —the health and safety of our customers and employees is our priority. Every decision we make is through that lens. We're ensuring we have the appropriate safety protocols in place, providing masks for all employees and customers to wear, and conducting employee health screenings. We're also flexible and constantly reevaluating best practices and closely monitoring any changes everywhere we operate.