

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You are listening to Work in Progress. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor-in-Chief of WorkingNation. Work in Progress explores the rapidly changing workplace through conversations with innovators, educators and decision makers, people with solutions to today's workforce challenges.

Recently I attended the Aspen Latino Business Summit in Washington DC where I met a variety of experts in economic development, business ownership, and policy to get an idea of how the next generation of Latino entrepreneurs can increase economic opportunities for all. This series for WorkingNation features interviews with those leaders.

This week's guest is Dwana Franklin-Davis, CEO of Reboot Representation who talked about how access, opportunity and exposure can help women of color get a headstart in tech careers. We started out talking about reboot.

Dwana Franklin-Davis, Reboot Representation CEO:

I'm the inaugural CEO of reboot, but not the founder. So Reboot was actually born from Pivotal Ventures, which is Melinda French Gates, her incubation organization. So way back in the day, in 2017, imagine if you will, wanting to understand what is happening with regards to corporations and their philanthropic investments. So Pivotal partnered with McKinsey and they did a survey. 32 amazing companies participated, and as you can imagine, 32 powerful, amazing corporations representing 500 billion in revenue, 500 million in philanthropic giving. What are they spending on women and girls in tech? So turned out they were spending 5% of their philanthropic dollars on women and girls in tech, and less than 0.1% went intentionally to Black, Latina and Native American women and girls in tech. So the magic number. And so for those that can't see, I got my air quotes around magic, the magic number from that less than 0.1% way back in the day 2017 was \$335,000. That's it.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

That's a rounding error for some companies.

Dwana Franklin-Davis, Reboot Representation CEO:

That's a rounding error. That's not even travel budget.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And given that even in 2017, or I shouldn't say even, but given in 2017, women, Latinos, Blacks, Asians, all these groups were a big part of our society and our workforce.

Dwana Franklin-Davis, Reboot Representation CEO:

Absolutely.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And there wasn't the investment in it.

Dwana Franklin-Davis, Reboot Representation CEO:

There wasn't the intentional investment. And so we also wanted to understand, well, who's graduating with computing degrees? Is this really an issue? Somewhere maybe five to 10 years before that, we shifted from intentionally recruiting, say Black workers or Hispanic workers, and it shifted to we need

more women in tech. And so again, air quotes around, we need more women in tech. And yes, the numbers for women were abysmal. And so then the narrative said, "Oh, well, we're doing great. The number of women are going up." And so with the same data in the same research, we wanted to understand who's actually graduating with computing degrees. So looking at the public data from iPad zip code 11 also, you might hear me say BLNA. I'm using the acronym for Black, Latino, Native American. So we use that to be more specific and intentional with regards to who we're speaking of and who we serve.

BLNA women in 2017 represented 4% of the graduating population, and that number was down by 33% from the previous decade and wasn't projected to double to 8% into the year 2052 without interventions. So this report was launched and released, but Reboot Representation was launched alongside it to be the call to action. So 2018 Reboot Representation Tech coalition was launched with 11 founding companies, and a year later I was brought on to lead the coalition. Today, I'm happy to say that we have 21, soon to publicly say 23, amazing companies that are like, "Absolutely, we want to be intentional about this mission."

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So being intentional, what does that involve? What is happening now?

Dwana Franklin-Davis, Reboot Representation CEO:

So through the coalition, we are able to pull the funding from these amazing companies that said, "Yes, we want to have intentional investment on Black, Latina and Native American women." And as we're following the class of 2025. So that means we are now able to make more of a systemic change to nonprofit organizations that are traditionally under-resourced, understaffed, underfunded, and focus on the least represented population in the tech community.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Are you working with smaller groups to make this happen? I mean, you can have the big coalition, but how do you get down boots on the ground?

Dwana Franklin-Davis, Reboot Representation CEO:

Yes. So Reboot Representation does not run programs in local cities and communities. We're a nonprofit, but we're also a funder. And so we are working with those that are boots on the ground and asking them, "Hey, what do you need to serve this community that you are entrenched in?" And so we're not swooping in giving silver bullet solutions. We are really looking to say, what does your specific community need? And as an example, today, I was talking to a gentleman, Latinas in New York City need different wraparound services than the Latinas that are in California, but they both need wraparound services for completion.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So that's great. Then you are doing it on a local level, but you're doing it by helping those organizations that are in the community making the difference already?

Dwana Franklin-Davis, Reboot Representation CEO:

Yes, we focus on local as well as national. So some of the programs that we fund or partner with serve students nationally, and that especially after 2020, the virtual community is also as important as the boots in the ground community.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Before we get into your new report, I often wonder what it is that has kept women and women of color or men of color for that matter, underrepresented groups out of the tech industry at such a great rate. I've heard people say maybe it's like lack of seeing themselves in that community. I was wondering what you thought about it.

Dwana Franklin-Davis, Reboot Representation CEO:

I don't know that you have that much time for me to go into all of the reasons. However, visibility is definitely part of it. And so there's that saying, if you can see it, you can be it. And I like to take it one step back. Access, exposure and opportunity are the core foundation of what is needed for anything. And so if we break down even access, that means a lot of different things. In 2020 when everything went virtual, even if we gave the student a tablet to do their homework on, it was a brick if they didn't have broadband. So broadband is something that is absolutely essential, like running water, we can say. So what does access mean? That could also mean access to programs, access to math, access to not being food and housing insecure, because how are we talking about CS education if the child is worried about being hungry? So there's a lot of things that build. Exposure is another thing that is absolutely key. And then what is that opportunity that we are affording, whether we're talking about students or early learners.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Access to time is also important. And if you're someone who has one job, two jobs, it's hard sometimes to get the training you need or the opportunity that you need.

Dwana Franklin-Davis, Reboot Representation CEO:

One of my favorite... Well, I don't have favorites, I have a lot of amazing partnerships, but as we talk about who is the learner and who is the student, one of our partnerships is with Western Governor's University. If I can just name-drop some of our, we have amazing partners all around, but, and again, air quotes. So a non-traditional student, and as we were talking about the non-traditional Latina or Black student that is maybe at Western Governor's, their average age of the student is 34. And so when we're talking about a 34-year-old woman pursuing her computing degree, she has different needs than that 18 to 22 year old student. She's probably working at least one job, which is why she prefers the online program. She may be caring for children or elders or other in her home or community. And so therefore, what we're able to provide for her through wraparound service needs to be different to support her individual needs for success.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And you have just put out a new report on the business case for investing in BLNA women. Give me some of the highlights, some of the key points of it.

Dwana Franklin-Davis, Reboot Representation CEO:

The bottom line statement is, we want corporations to work smarter, not harder. And this report is your guide to that. And so we surveyed over 2000 employees with technical titles, more than half of which were BLNA, women with technical titles. The other nearly half were their peers and said, "Hey, how did these policies and practices aid you in your journey?" And as we're looking specifically at recruiting, but not just recruiting, retention is also key and then advancement. And so it's quite costly for organizations to keep having to turn over employees. And so from this data, we learned the nine cornerstone policies that companies can have that should have in order to effectively recruit, retain in advance, be all new talent. And guess what, 80% of all others said, we need this stuff too. So it's just good employee practice.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And maybe give me a couple of the top two employee practices that would really make a difference in retaining this because what you just said is so important. It costs so much money to bring people in, onboard them, and they may not know the process, so then you're training them. But if you have people inside and you're making sure that they're getting access to more opportunity, it's profitable.

Dwana Franklin-Davis, Reboot Representation CEO:

Like I said, there were nine, but I'll give two. But I need to make sure that we understand that this is not a checkbox list. I don't want companies to look at this list and go "Check, check, check. We're good. We got this," because that is not the case. So in this example, one of the top nine was paid sick leave. And so I paused there because every single one of my partners, and probably yours as well, has paid sick leave as an option. So I don't... "Check. Done. We got that one Dwana." No. What comes out in the data in the surveys as to and why this was one of the top Black, Latina and Native American women did not feel they could leverage this practice even though it was there. There's a number of reasons why There's not even one single answer real quickly, I'll share.

It could be cultural. As a Black American, I was told that I have to work three times as hard as everybody else to be seen as equal. I hear that a lot from other immigrant families as well. Communities of color as well. And so if it's your mindset that "I always have to be here, I always have to be present. I must work through illness," then you're not taking the time. Two, a systems issue. And one of my former employers, we had to input our out of office time in blocks of four, four hour blocks. Well, I've set up my life in my community where I can run to the doctor in 30 minutes and I can run here in 30 minutes. I don't need a whole block of four. And so that was a limitation of I don't want to waste four hours when I only need 30 to 45 minutes on this. And so they didn't realize that that was a barrier to entry because people saw that as wasting their time. And then-

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You don't want to use it all up-

Dwana Franklin-Davis, Reboot Representation CEO:

You don't want to use it all up.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

... if you don't need to.

Dwana Franklin-Davis, Reboot Representation CEO:

I only need 30 minutes. Why are we doing this? And then maybe another example would be, well, I'm a mom and I'm actually in that sandwich generation where I have aging elders, my parents, and also little kid. So I'm in the thick of it. So do I know if I can use my sick time to run my kid to the doctor's visit, which they often have, especially when they're little or if I need to help with my mom. And so making sure that all of your employees can see themselves in the policy so that they're able to effectively leverage them. And the only way an organization is going to know if all of their employees are leveraging all of the practices that they put out is if they're collecting data and disaggregating it at a minimum by race and gender.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And then you had another example you wanted to share with me on, but it's not a checkbox.

Dwana Franklin-Davis, Reboot Representation CEO:

It's not a checkbox. So I'm going to call this one a new school example. So basic leave sounds kind of like, yeah, one of those kind of basic. We know that, and that's kind of like, okay. A newer example that came out is having mentors through the interview process. And so when I have shared this one, I get a lot of, what's that? What does that mean? You can think of it as the guide into the company. You have to remember that this is the first experience that this potential employee is going to have with this team as well.

And so you want that also to be a favorable experience. And so not to give the insider tips and tricks on how to pass the interview, but do you understand the lingo that we have. Especially in tech, we speak in acronyms, right? Do you understand what the process is? Someone to really help guide you through, answer your questions, be that one-stop shop is going to help you through and then be able to, if you move to the next level, to just help with the ins and outs, the company nuances that only company people know.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

My reaction first was, huh, that's interesting. I never heard of that. But is that something that a lot of companies are actually implementing?

Dwana Franklin-Davis, Reboot Representation CEO:

This is relatively new. Some companies, yes, have implemented that and are implementing. We've got some awesome stories of that, but that was one of the things that came out in the top nine things that BLNA women wanted.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So you've been around for the last, since 2017.

Dwana Franklin-Davis, Reboot Representation CEO:

So year five for Reboot. You're four for me.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Okay. And so in that five and four, have you seen any progress? Do you feel like there is movement to be more inclusive of the BLNA population?

Dwana Franklin-Davis, Reboot Representation CEO:

Yes. Yes on so many fronts. So I am ecstatic to watch the numbers of BLNA women graduating with computing degrees. We've almost reached our doubling goal. We're almost there. So that is definitely something to celebrate. But also, I don't want to give the pat on the back to say we're done because although we're watching the actual numbers increase, which is beautiful and amazing, the percentages are only slightly nudging up, which is not good enough. Also mindful, we are following the class of 2025, and if you think about that class, they are currently in their junior year of college, and they were juniors in high school at the height of the pandemic. So to refresh, or for those that don't remember, because I know I've tried to block that period out.

Black and brown communities especially went through some intense hardships to say the least, and things that data shows were critical for students to be successful in engineering or any STEM field went virtual or went away. So I'm talking your advanced math classes, your AP calculus, your AP computer science, all those bridge programs went virtual or away. And we haven't seen the results of that in data yet. And so I say that the class of 2025 might be a cliff as they're trying to maneuver and decide what they need and what they want to do. But I'm hoping that it's not a dramatic drop. And so I'm still hopeful that because of the momentum that we've had both through our corporate partners that are intentional about how we are pulling these investments as well as our nonprofit partners that are rolling up their sleeves with us, the movement is great.

I want to also say we're watching the numbers in industry go down. The numbers of BLNA women and industry are going down at the very moment that graduation rates are going up. And so we have a graph that looks like a very visible X and that is alarming. And that's what keeps us up at night, which is why we produced this second report because we want to make sure that corporations have the tools they need in order to make the minor adjustments to work smarter and not harder and be able to effectively recruit, retain, and advance a diverse workforce.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And we know how important a diverse workforce is, a diversity of idea, of culture, of living experience. And I think businesses only profit from having that diversity.

Dwana Franklin-Davis, Reboot Representation CEO:

Absolutely. It can cost up to two times of an employee's salary when they leave, when you have to replace them. And so these numbers aren't new. We've been talking about that for a while. And so it doesn't impact the direct manager when they have to do that as far as they don't feel that dollar loss. The corporation feels that dollar loss. But if we are intentional about how are we building our employee base and how are we supporting them and creating practices and policies that really benefit the whole person, this is not necessarily about one individual group at the sacrifice of another. These policies and practices help all of their employees.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Is there something else in the report that you think is important that we haven't talked about?

Dwana Franklin-Davis, Reboot Representation CEO:

I just want to double click on the fact that implementing these policies is something that is necessary for us to move the culture for of recruiting, retaining, and advancing talent. And I want organizations to look at this as a toolkit and a toolbox. But on the flip side of that, that's for the company. That's my message

to companies. As I'm talking to women who are in the workplace and they're looking for what do I do? Where do I go? This is also your toolkit to say, "Does the company have these things that are important to me?" And they will have some power to make real decisions on if that environment is a place where they want to be.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Thank you very much.

Dwana Franklin-Davis, Reboot Representation CEO:

Thank you.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

That was my interview with Dwana Franklin-Davis, CEO of Reboot Representation. We met at the Aspen Latino Business Summit in Washington, DC. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor-in-chief of WorkingNation. Thank you for listening.