

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Tapestry gives luxury brands a template for workplace inclusion

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Women are the majority of many luxury workforces. Image credit: Tapestry

By SARAH RAMIREZ

NEW YORK Amplifying opportunities and resources within the workplace is vital to ensuring women and minorities are included in company culture and leadership.

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In a conversation at Women in Luxury 2019 on May 9, Tapestry's Matthew Trent and Martin Shanker of Shanker Inc. discussed the relationship between workforce leaders and cultures. At the American luxury group, feedback from employees helps shape policies at the corporate level.

"We really wanted to make sure people felt like they could move ahead in the company," said Mr. Trent, vice president of global talent at **Tapestry**, New York. "We want people to truly build a career."

Women in Luxury 2019 was produced by Luxury Daily, with venue sponsor UBS

Tapestry team

Tapestry, the parent company of Coach, Kate Spade and Stuart Weitzman, recently undertook a global listening tour to learn what employees thought of the group's values.

Inclusion was one of the values that stood out when employees were asked to describe Tapestry. Seventy-six percent of Tapestry's 21,000 employees are women.

Although many fashion companies see fewer women at the top of the corporate ladder, women made up a third of the Tapestry board in fiscal year 2018. While the CEOs for Tapestry, Coach and Stuart Weitzman are all men, Anna Bakst is the chief executive officer and brand president for Kate Spade New York.

"We have a very strong female presence at the company at every level," Mr. Trent said.

Additionally, almost 40 percent of employees at Tapestry's U.S. headquarters identify as non-caucasians.

Publicly sharing workplace demographics is one way Tapestry works to ensure women and minorities are included throughout its business.

Emphasizing internal job mobility is another strategy Tapestry employs to retain a diverse workforce. All jobs are advertised, and employees are encouraged to apply for opportunities across different brands, departments and locations.

In 2018, Tapestry expanded Kate Spade's 12 week parental leave policy companywide.

The company also launched a Working Parents Community, offering support to all parents and helping them find spaces they can trust in the workplace.

"Demands at home never go away," Mr. Trent said.

Workplace support

At Tapestry, inclusion and employee support extends beyond just its corporate employees.

Seventy-eight percent of Tapestry's retail workers are women, including full-time and part-time employees. An effort is made to create flexible work schedules, further empowering these women.

All luxury brands can benefit by support their retail associates, whose emotional intelligence helps buttress customer relations, according to Mr. Shanker, president of Shanker Inc.

A highly personalized experience is vital within luxury shopping. While team members on the floor may not be wealthy themselves, they are catering to affluent clientele and they need to find ways to forge a connection despite their differences in culture ([see story](#)).

More luxury groups have been implementing inclusive policies to support their workforces.

In a show of support for its employees and their families, beauty group Este Lauder Companies extended paid parental leave to 20 weeks and offers enhanced flexibility to new parents just returning to work ([see story](#)).

Since 2017, Kering-owned fashion house Gucci and Milan's Bocconi University have collaborated on the Gucci Research Lab project to explore how luxury businesses can effectively evolve in the 21st century's rapidly changing environment.

The primary focus of the Gucci Research Lab is company culture and how "a startup mentality, employee empowerment, risk-taking, fast decision making and agile processes" can create ideal working conditions for employees. Gucci's efforts with Bocconi University underscore its parent company's dedication to foster work-life balance and gender equality at all levels of its group ([see story](#)).

"People are responsible for the culture of their team," Mr. Shanker said.