Deandra Weaver has found that her diverse ethnicity advanced and challenged her life and career in expected and unanticipated ways. An Afro-Latina of Dominican descent, she’s a first-generation American born in New York, and raised in “very Cuban” Hialeah.

This diverse lineage and upbringing has helped Weaver form strong personal relationships, first with friends and college peers, and later with clients. She earned a Gates Millennium Scholarship and was able to become the first in her family to attend and graduate college. She served as the head of multicultural recruitment at Yale College, and later as national co-chair of the Yale Latino Alumni Association.

Weaver joined J.P. Morgan in 2011. Fluent in English, Spanish and Portuguese, she works closely with clients in South Florida and Puerto Rico, and mentors junior analysts as part of the firm’s program for rising Hispanic talent.

Weaver is also a “big sister” with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Miami. Mentorship has played such an important role in her personal and career advancement that she seeks to pay it forward.

“In terms of challenges, it’s certainly been tough being the ‘first’ or the ‘only’ in many spaces I’ve occupied throughout my career,” Weaver recalled. “Growing up, I thought about being a teller at a bank. I didn’t think about going to Wall Street. I just benefitted so much from teachers and advocates who believed in me. I’m paying it forward, knowing how much it’s benefited my career.”

**ANY ADVICE FOR DIVERSE EXECUTIVES HOPING TO RISE IN THE PROFESSIONAL WORLD?** Embrace the qualities that set you apart – whether it’s a passion, a skill or expertise in a certain subject matter. It’s always impressive to come across someone with the ability to find their niche, lean into it and excel. As diverse executives, we have a unique perspective that we bring to the table and embracing your unique qualities can allow you to thrive.

**HOW CAN A COMPANY “BAKE” DE&I INTO ITS MISSION?** It starts with the mission statement and the goals of the organization. This should ideally carve a vision to develop diverse recruiting and training practices from the perspective of employees, and then establish consideration for diversity when it comes to suppliers or products that are relevant to a company’s operations.

**HOW CAN WE GET MORE ORGANIZATIONS ON BOARD WITH DE&I?** We shouldn’t be afraid to open the door with a data-driven approach. Countless studies have explored the ways in which DE&I initiatives improve attraction and retention rates for talent acquisition, company profitability, and innovation over the longer term. At the end of the day, these policies are good for business and good for the wellness of the employees that work for those businesses.

**WHAT RESPONSIBILITY DO YOU AND YOUR PEERS HAVE TO ADVANCE DE&I IN YOUR WORKPLACE?** I feel very personally motivated to advance DE&I efforts, and a large part of this comes from a place of wanting to pay it forward. I’ve been fortunate to benefit from programs focused on DE&I throughout my youth and early career, which opened doors for me in unfamiliar spaces. Doing the same for others helps broaden the number of people benefiting from these initiatives and widen the conversation regarding its importance in the workplace.

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