

## DEI Spotlight – Dejuan Hardy

NYAMA's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee continues to encounter people who are championing DEI through their careers. Dejuan (pronounced Deh-wahn) Hardy, Chief Diversity Officer of Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) is a great example.

Mr. Hardy is a seasoned professional with a diverse background in Human Resources, Employment, and Diversity. His career has been characterized by progressive leadership and expertise in various areas, including employee relations, conflict resolution, diversity training, equal employment, affirmative action, and compliance. With an impressive track record, Dejuan has left a mark on the field, most notably through his recent work with the Department of Veteran Affairs.



Dejuan's journey began with a strong educational foundation that laid the groundwork for his success. He pursued a Bachelor of Business Administration from Medaille College which equipped him with the knowledge and skills necessary to excel in the fields of Human Resources and Employment.

Throughout his career, Dejuan has demonstrated a remarkable commitment to enhancing workplace environments and fostering inclusivity. His leadership in employee relations has been pivotal in maintaining harmonious relationships within organizations. Dejuan's expertise in conflict resolution has not only diffused tense situations but also contributed to a more productive and collaborative workforce.

Dejuan's dedication to diversity is reflected in his extensive work in diversity training. His initiatives have not only raised awareness about the importance of inclusivity but have also created lasting change within the organizations he's been a part of. His efforts in equal employment and affirmative action have further demonstrated his commitment to fairness and equality.

Beyond his professional achievements, Dejuan Hardy is also a veteran who proudly served in the U.S. Air Force. He participated in Operation Enduring Freedom. His service to the nation exemplifies his dedication and courage, traits that have undoubtedly influenced his approach to leadership and problem-solving.



In his most recent role at the Department of Veteran Affairs, Dejuan brought his extensive experience and passion for improving the lives of veterans. His contributions to the organization have had a significant impact on the well-being of those who have served the country.

Dejuan Hardy's journey is one of dedication, expertise, and unwavering commitment. From his educational pursuits to his military service and his influential roles in Human Resources and Employment, Dejuan's life story is a testament to the power of leadership and the positive change that can be achieved through hard work and determination. His legacy continues to inspire others to strive for excellence and to create more inclusive and harmonious work environments.

Dejuan participated in a DEI Spotlight interview and shared some thoughts on various aviation and DEI topics.

***What is your earliest aviation-related memory?***

The first time I ever flew I was so afraid. I was flying from Alaska to California to visit my father and I just kept thinking about a scene from a movie. There was a movie, Contact with Jodie Foster and Matthew McConaughey, where the person is so scared and screaming on a plane "I'm ok to go". I did the same exact thing, which likely bothered my mother, where I just kept screaming "I'm ok to go". I was so excited to visit my dad but had to get over the fear of take off and landing. It is quite a vivid memory for both me and my mother.

***How/where did you get your start in aviation?***

I started my working career in the Air Force. My original position was in charge of aircraft scheduling for aircraft that went overseas. I liked the job a lot. I didn't have to fix the aircraft, but I had to know a lot about them. I made sure we had parts that were needed and made sure whatever maintenance documentation was needed we had available. It gave me a lot of knowledge on aircraft health, understanding, and considerations. I had to orchestrate flight times, where the aircraft was going, for how long, layover information, etc. This taught me a lot about planning and forecasting. I encounter those topics often in my current role, especially in a DEI role. You have to keep forecasts in mind and make sure everything lines up properly.

***What important lessons have you learned about DE&I over the course of your career?***

I have learned how complex DEI is and how involved the topic is. I believe that inclusivity creates better diversity. Diversity is not just about race, it is about age, social diversity, religion, education, and many other nuances. If you foster an inclusive work environment, it will create a more diverse environment.

In my workplace, I have people with many different backgrounds and knowledge bases within the work environment. These people help me relate to various groups better. They





help me understand more. Just listening, understanding, and being more compassionate makes me more sensitive and understand different ideas and opinions which makes our work place a better environment for everyone.

For a specific example, we have learned to try to diversify our interview panel when interviewing a potential candidate. We have a diverse panel for each interview that matches the candidate being interviewed. We try to have someone in the room that each person can relate to and make the process as comfortable and effective as possible.

***How have you helped to make DE&I part of the culture and fabric of your organization?***

I have to start by sharing this is not just because of me. I am very fortunate to have the leadership we have here at NFTA. Kim Minkel, our executive director, prioritizes DEI more than any other director I've encountered. She is a woman leading this group, which is incredibly rare. She gives me all the tools and resources needed to make sure we are moving in the right direction. I also work hand and hand with our HR leader, Karen Novo, Vice President, Human Resources and Talent Management, who helps me bring DEI to life.

I just finished a DEI strategic plan here at NFTA, where we put together well-thought-out goals and strategies to follow over the next 4-5 years. We put a lot of time, energy, and focus on our DEI goals here and with that have many DEI accomplishments both internally and with contractors.

We work with many small businesses in the area to help them find opportunities at the airport. We try to reach out to and support Minority and Women owned businesses. We are constantly improving our DEI statistics with our vendor interactions. We look at the overall community and see where we stand vs who is in the area. We have a goal and try our best to see if we can meet it. I am very passionate about diversity spending and hope that it is able to benefit all portions of our community.

***If I could change just one thing about DE&I in aviation, I would \_\_\_\_\_.***

I would love to see our industry set clear goals so aviation can be a positive industry for DEI topics. I would like to see people be a bit more open-minded and provide more of a welcoming position. I think we should also change our language on the topic. If we constantly say that aviation is a white male dominated industry, it will discourage people from other backgrounds from applying for aviation positions. I think that would be a shame because I know this industry is so open with many different career choices. It is more open industry so we should act like it.

If companies have mentor positions, challenge yourself and mentor someone outside your usual candidates. Try to develop internship programs or put programs in place to involve minority and women in aviation groups. Try to make connections that make the workplace more open to all.





Some concrete ideas might be diversifying an interview panel when going through resumes. This might help with any unconscious bias, if you read something that you don't understand someone else might understand it better and be able to relay that to the group. Having a more diverse group reviewing resumes and understanding the candidate options will help get more and better candidates through the door.

Another concrete example would be encouraging work committees. At NFTA we have different committees that help with employee connection and outreach such as an African American Committee, Native American Committee, LGBTQ Committee, etc. These committees help our employees feel more comfortable and supported within our company. The committees have all grown a lot since they started and are very active. This is part of the fabric at NFTA for our employees and allows them a space to feel heard and be comfortable.

