



KELLIE WISE: INCLUSION IN THE FINANCIAL FIELD



Kellie Wise
Principal

Through her own experience as a woman in the financial field, Edward Jones Principal Kellie Wise discusses both the hardships of overcoming biases, as well as what it looks like to prioritize and implement inclusive behaviors throughout Edward Jones. The following is the partial transcript of a podcast hosted by Deborah Levine.

DEBORAH LEVINE “Welcome to the American Diversity Report podcasts where we interview innovators and diverse change makers. I’m Deborah Levine, your host and editor of the American Diversity Report, and with me today is Kellie Wise from Edward Jones. She is a Principal at Edward Jones responsible for field-based inclusion and diversity. In her role, Kellie promotes the programs and policies that creates financial advisor and branch team inclusion in the field. Welcome Kellie.”

KELLIE WISE “Thank you, I’m so glad to be here.”

DEBORAH “Pleasure, tell us how you got involved in the area of diversity and inclusion in the first place?”

KELLIE “Yeah, Deborah it really started years

ago, I’ve been in the financial services industry for quite some time and I spent 16 years in the banking industry and then ultimately moved over to the investment firm side of the equation. In 1999 and I started my career here at Edward Jones building my practice, serving clients and helping as many people as possible when I was a single mom and my passion really started when I came here and saw what it really meant to be, as a female, being truly supported and embraced in what was typically a very male-dominated field in the past, so it just sparked my passion and here I am years later you know very, very, excited to be able to try to make a difference on a larger scale.”

DEBORAH “Wonderful, you’ve spent quite a number of years working in this area.”

KELLIE “Yes, definitely, definitely love it.”

DEBORAH “So tell us: why is it so important to improve inclusion and diversity in the financial services industry?”

KELLIE “As advisors our jobs are really to create meaningful differences in the lives of our clients I mean I know this firsthand as a former advisor for 18 years, I just absolutely adored my clients and in order to deliver an incredible client experience I really feel our industry must better understand the needs of the society in which we you know serve and that means actively seeking out new voices and viewpoints and perspectives and at the end of the day doing so we can provide clients with choices based on their unique needs and backgrounds by focusing on inclusion and diversity.”

DEBORAH “Excellent, must have seen quite a bit as an advisor of people wanting your assistance. What did you do for them?”

KELLIE “You know it is a very trusted role and a precious relationship to be able to serve clients, to be able to find out what really matters to them, what are they trying to accomplish, what are their goals, what’s you know creating anxiety for them, any of those things are all incredibly relevant to what you do as a financial advisor, you know you take all of that information for individuals, for families, for multi-generational families, and you put you know a road map together, a plan in which you can help them work towards achieving all of their, all of their goals and dreams you know it’s very rewarding to be in that role.”

DEBORAH “Thank you, I’m sure many people in our audience are delighted to have more information on what an advisor actually does, I bet some of them could use those services as we speak – so tell us what is Edward Jones’ approach to diversity and inclusion?”

KELLIE “We understand that in order to deliver that incredible Edward Jones client experience I just mentioned, you know we must also create an environment where associates are nurtured and can bring their best selves to work. Recruiting diverse candidates is certainly a priority. It’s equally important that we support, retain and develop these diverse professionals. We continue to invest in programs that build community and support the development of our female and diverse financial advisors.”

DEBORAH “Tell us some of the specific initiatives you have in place to do all that?”

KELLIE “Sure, Deborah, one of them is our Women’s Initiative for New Growth Strategies, that’s our acronym is WINGS for that program and it’s designed to further strengthen, advance career trajectories for our women advisors and our BRIDGE program which is similarly designed to accelerate success for our diverse advisors. These programs provide professional impact opportunities for mentorship and networking, increased client retention, create a sense of belonging within our firm, and when associates are comfortable bringing their best selves to work, we all feel they can bring their best to our clients and the families we’re privileged to serve to be honest.”

DEBORAH “I know that a lot of people feel that there’s a lack of women in the financial services industry and they hope that it will improve, how is this working for Edward Jones?”

KELLIE “I think we have made tremendous progress; I think that we are you know very, very committed to making further progress. We do have a really healthy number of female financial advisors today but we would like

even more, we would like even more diverse candidates, more females, but we also look at inclusion from you know just the overall perspective of the diverse thought and diverse backgrounds that people bring you know to the plate for us.”

DEBORAH “Yes, oh my, so you know there are a lot of firms out there that are trying to be inclusive and what kind of advice would you give them, what can they do based on what you already have learned?”

KELLIE “Well first they can take some actionable steps, I mean, everyone within an organization is responsible for creating and fostering an inclusive environment, but Deborah the leaders in an organization set the tone and must model the behaviors they want others to demonstrate. In 2019, Edward Jones’ first woman managing partner, Penny Pennington, was one of the more than 150 CEOs to sign the CEO Action for Diversity and Inclusion Pledge, that’s a nationwide initiative to advance D&I in the workplace and to see this champion from the helm of our organization highlights our focus on inclusion and creates a culture you know where it can thrive, so we really focused on belonging, not solely on inclusion, recruiting diverse candidates as I mentioned before, I mean it’s a priority, it’s definitely step one, but it’s just as important to support their development and continued growth you know to create that true sense of belonging and we focus on creating an environment that embraces diversity, encourages individuals to bring their best selves to work, couple that really with the programs that allow associates to excel and network and attain mentorship.

DEBORAH “So, as you go and try and recruit a diverse workforce where do you go and how do you do that?”

KELLIE “I think everyone’s different I mean we have over 18,000 financial advisors, we have so many branch office administrators that help run our practices as you think through many times through natural networks, you know people that they know in the communities, community professionals, professional circles, you know things like that, I think we definitely have more of a grassroots type approach where we reach out to as many people in our communities who are professionals that might be interested and make them more comfortable just learning more about Edward Jones, learning more about the opportunity and then just seeing if they if they think it might be a good fit.”

DEBORAH “And if there was someone in the community who hadn’t been contacted but was interested, how would they go about learning more so that they could apply or just generate a conversation?”

KELLIE “You bet, they could go to two different things: number one just take a look at EdwardJones.com website, there’s a career section. We do a really thorough job of trying to make people feel comfortable learning just by looking on the internet about you know, how the role operates so they can try to picture ‘can I see myself doing that’ but more importantly what I really recommend is, and I’ve had people join our firm by stopping in to my office when I was a financial adviser and actually being able to talk to someone who does the role day in and day out and knows what it’s like to be able to take care of clients and have that relationship, so either stop by a local office or look at our website or do both of the above.”

DEBORAH “Wonderful! And again, how many offices do you have?”

KELLIE “We have over 15,500 financial

advisors both here in the US and in Canada.”

DEBORAH “One thing that you said that really stirs my imagination was that you have ways to relate that are inclusive, that are sort of, they may even be written down, is that correct?”

KELLIE “Yes, we have you know one of our key responsibilities for all of our partners of our firm which are what we call ‘the leaders’ that are really trying to help drive all of our key initiatives is having demonstrating inclusive behaviors as a key responsibility, so we expect it from everyone from the top all the way down to the associates who are really doing you know, the tough work, important work of serving our clients, doing that face to face work that is so critical, so it’s at all levels of our firm to have that demonstrating inclusive behaviors as a key responsibility for us all .”

DEBORAH “Can you share with us what some of that inclusive behavior is? I’m very curious?”

KELLIE “Yes, part of it is you know knowing that words matter, how we lead matters, it’s not just getting results. We care deeply about our clients, we care deeply about each other and we foster a culture where our clients come first, our associates matter and we feel that words matter, so part of it is everything from how we act, how we lead, how we speak, making sure that people are feeling you know valued and heard and respected. So, we actually try to articulate what inclusive behaviors are as much as possible and that’s just a few as an example.”

DEBORAH “Yes, that’s very admirable goals, I appreciate it and I imagine any other people

appreciate these efforts to be inclusive in interpersonal relationships. I gather you also have policies, written policies that guide your diversity and inclusion efforts too?”

KELLIE “Yes, we do, our HR side of the house helps, you know to maintain all of those and guide all of those so it’s not my particular area of expertise but we absolutely have things to make sure that that we’re doing everything right.”

DEBORAH “Excellent. It sounds like you have a multi-faceted program set up for diversity and inclusion and I wonder if there’s anything else you would like to add for our audience about it?”

KELLIE “I think more than anything, you already had such a great question about, you know what could people do if they were interested, I think if anyone is interested in having a really comfortable conversation with somebody whether they’re looking to possibly be a client or they’re looking to possibly, you know take on the role as a financial advisor, we would love the opportunity to have them take a closer look at us. We’re very easy to talk to yet we take our work very seriously, so you know we’re definitely a place where everyone is welcome.”

DEBORAH “Wonderful, and if I were in your area you would find me on your doorstep Monday morning.”

KELLIE “Thanks, Deborah, that’s great to hear.” ■