

Biography

DEBRA J. NELSON

President, Elevate



Debra Nelson is recognized among the nation's leading diversity and inclusion practitioners and public relations experts. Her professional career includes executive positions at industries spanning media, higher education, automotive manufacturing, construction, and gaming and hospitality. Today she leads Elevate, a firm dedicated to delivering professional development and communication services.

Debra's most recent corporate appointment was as Director and Head of Communications for Brasfield & Gorrie, one of the nation's largest privately held construction firms. In this role, she helped enhance the company's inclusion practices as a member of the Diversity and Inclusion Executive Steering Committee.

As Vice President at MGM Resorts International, Debra steered the diversity initiative to national prominence and helped the company increase revenue and profitability. Additionally, she has held appointments at DaimlerChrysler and Mercedes-Benz companies, and in higher education and broadcast media.

While serving as Board Chair of the Urban Chamber of Commerce, Debra led negotiations that resulted in a partnership with the city of Las Vegas for the operations of a multimillion dollar business incubator. She also created the Diversity Professionals Network as a platform for sharing and promoting best practices in the gaming industry. In addition, she founded the Women's Leadership Conference in Las Vegas, a national event focused on the personal and professional development of women leaders.

For her professional contributions, Debra was recognized as one of the nation's leading diversity and inclusion professionals by Black Enterprise, DiversityInc, and Savoy magazines. Global Gaming Business magazine named her among its "25 people to watch" for influencing diversity in the gaming industry. Additionally, automotive journalists named her "Woman of the Year" for impacting diversity and inclusion in the auto industry.

Among many other accolades for civic and professional contributions, Debra is an inductee of the Nevada Women's Chamber of Commerce Hall of Fame, where she also holds its highest honor, the Athena Award for Leadership. She is also recipient of the "Woman of Distinction" award from the National Association of Women Business Owners, Las Vegas Chapter.

Debra serves on the corporate board of Noland Health Services, Inc., the Advisory Board for the Center for Urban Education at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), and the Board of Visitors for the College of Communication and Information Sciences at the University of Alabama.

She is a career coach, speaker, and seminar leader on topics related to diversity and inclusion, professional development and women's empowerment. Debra is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, and The Links, Incorporated, where she serves as Vice President of the Birmingham (AL) Chapter.