

# What we learned at Spelman College

Fall 2024

*“A few years ago, we noticed a lot of employees, from different groups, leaving the company. The data told us what was happening, but it couldn’t tell us why. So, we started speaking with employees, and eventually we launched a major initiative to address talent retention.*

*Today, any employee can start a career conversation, whether they have early thoughts of moving or if they already have a competitive offer on the table. We’ve worked with 4,600 employees to date. I’m proud to say that we have a 92% retention rate.” – Fortune 100 executive*

Corporate leaders now treat talent acquisition, retention, and development as business imperatives. They have little choice in the matter, because demographic shifts, changing norms around work and work-life balance, financial volatility, and artificial intelligence are reshaping workforces around the world. They are challenging long-held beliefs and trying fundamentally new approaches to talent.

To learn more, Tapestry Networks, working in partnership with Spelman College, convened a multi-generational dialogue, [Reimagining the Future of Talent](#), on Spelman’s Atlanta campus during [National HBCU Week](#). Top executives and board members from over 40 organizations engaged with academic leaders, faculty, and students from Spelman College, Morehouse College, Morehouse School of Medicine, Georgetown University, and Brown University. Spelman President Helene Gayle reflected on the [knowledge exchange](#): *“The global trends indicate we’re going to have a more diverse workforce. I think all workplaces will be enhanced if we think about tapping into people’s unique contributions and allowing them to be their authentic selves in the workplace.”*



## What we learned:

- **The demographic realities are alarming.** Demographic shifts are transforming the talent landscape. Data from the [U.S. Chamber of Commerce](#) show that the U.S. workforce is aging: birth rates dropped by 50% from 1950 to 2021. Immigration's contribution to population growth fell by 76% over the past decade, and workforce participation rates have trended steadily downward. Driven by the rising cost of traditional college education, 2022-2023 saw a 16% rise in vocationally-focused community college enrollment. On current trends, by 2045 roughly half of Americans will come from diverse backgrounds. New talent strategies are critical, not just for competitive success but for business survival.
- **Organizations are racing to adapt policies, processes, and cultures.** *“There’s been a shift in attitudes – many do not want work to be the center of their lives and feel a desire to work for a company that reflects their values. Ultimately, these are good things, and organizations need to figure out what it means for workforce strategies.”* Leading companies are rethinking their approaches to employee engagement, retention, and workplace culture. They seek environments that align with employee values while driving business outcomes.
- **New attitudes toward loyalty, career paths, and entrepreneurship are revolutionizing the employer-employee relationship.** Employers and employees are rethinking fundamental assumptions. Forward-thinking companies are testing new approaches. Some, for example, track departing high performers and lure them back with ‘boomerang’ programs. *“Even if people choose to grow and learn outside the company for a period of time, by maintaining a connection, we can welcome them back.”* Many Spelman students have launched their own businesses during their university career, and new entrants to the workforce are running entrepreneurial ventures or taking on gig work, either instead of or alongside corporate roles. Younger workers regularly say that they want more individualized career trajectories, and companies are responding with new rotational experiences and development pathways. *“We help people move to different functions of the company where they can have various roles and experiences. That has played a significant role in our retention strategy.”*
- **Data plays a critical role.** *“We’ve made significant progress in the past decade in gathering data about gaps in talent and shortcomings in approach and outcome. Now the challenge for boards is to ensure the conversation around it continues.”* Data has become essential in shaping talent strategies, but not all data is of equal value in driving action--aggregate data can hide differential results for various groups, and point-in-time snapshots are of relatively little use. *“You need to break down the data and ask, “Why were women or diverse candidates not advancing?” It includes looking at pay equity*

*trends to identify discrepancies related to race or gender that need to be corrected.”*

Leaders highlighted the importance of not just presenting data but translating it into actionable insights and meaningful outcomes. *“It’s not just about the data presented on the page; it’s about what lies beyond it. What actions are being taken based on this data?”*

- **Disruptive technologies demand agility in almost every organizational role.** Whether traditionally knowledge-based, skills-based, or hands-on, jobs are changing rapidly. *“We’re in an environment where technology is reshaping future roles so quickly that the jobs of tomorrow will be vastly different from those of today.”* Rapid innovation is making it difficult for leaders of large organizations to secure talent that can adapt to technological innovation and scale with it. *“The biggest challenge is finding the right talent to compete in the technology space who can lead on innovation. It’s not just about finding technologists, but leaders who can combine business leadership with a deep understanding of how to integrate technology into strategy and operations.”* While there is no question that technology is changing the way that we work, executives and directors strongly emphasized the need for certain evergreen skills such as problem solving, critical reasoning, and effective communication.
- **Healthcare faces an acute talent crisis with real implications for health outcomes.** *“Who we educate and how we educate both matter. Improved health outcomes are evident when patient-provider relationships reflect similarities in race, ethnicity and gender,”* said Valerie Montgomery Rice, President and Dean of Morehouse School of Medicine. *“Interventions in STEM education must start early, to create a pipeline of diverse talent that can fill future positions, whether as health care providers or in industry roles,”* said Beth Cameron, Senior Advisor in the Brown University School of Public Health.

\* \* \*

The leaders who joined the meeting at Spelman said that it was valuable, but only as a beginning. *“The most important next step,”* said one, *“will expand the conversation to recent graduates, early career professionals, diverse alumni of Spelman, Morehouse, and other institutions who have been in the workforce for 5 years or less. Creating safe spaces for these young professionals to candidly share their experiences is crucial.”*

They identified numerous topics for further exploration, stressing the value of dialogue between corporate leaders, academic leaders, and students. One cited *“the evolving dynamics of mentorship, sponsorship, and allyship in advancing diverse talent.”* Leaders returned to the theme of data and metrics, stressing the importance of going *“beyond performative actions.”*

All felt that frankness and honesty in moving toward new practices was difficult but essential: *“the atmosphere of openness led to increasingly frank discussions about the challenges and opportunities as the day progressed.”*

## Participating organizations

AMB Sports + Entertainment	Day 1 Sports + Entertainment Management	Novartis
Accenture	Dexcom	Organon
Acuity Brands	Digimarc	Palo Alto Networks
Adecco Group	Georgetown University	Pandemic Center at Brown University
AIG	Google	Primerica
Aramark	Honeywell	Salesforce
Assemble.fyi	Integral Ad Science	Shirley Proctor Puller Foundation
AtkinsRealis	Kohl's	Society for Human Resources Foundation
BoardWalk Consulting	LHH Recruitment Solutions	The Jasco Group
Boston Scientific	LMH Strategies, Inc.	USAID
Bristol-Myers Squibb	Mondelez International	Warner Brothers Discovery Group
CDW Corp	Morehouse College	Wittkiewer
Celsius	Morehouse School of Medicine	Women of Color Retail Alliance
Cigna	Nanocan Therapeutics	WW Grainger
The Coca-Cola Company	Newman's Own	



[Tapestry Networks](#) brings world-class leaders together to tackle complex challenges and promote positive change through the power of connected thinking.



[Spelman College](#), a global leader in the education of women of African descent, is dedicated to academic excellence in the liberal arts and sciences and the intellectual, creative, ethical and leadership development of its students. For 18 years, Spelman has been number 1 in the *US News and World Report* ranking of historically Black colleges and universities. Its 2,100 students come from 43 US states and 11 countries.

### Media Relations Contact:

Amy Christenson, Tapestry Networks Managing Director, Operations  
[achristenson@tapestrynetworks.com](mailto:achristenson@tapestrynetworks.com)