

James Kinney sheds some light on joining Ogilvy North America



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Ogilvy recently announced that James Nicholas Kinney has been appointed global chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer and chief people officer for North America.



I find out more about what the role entails, and what unique approach Kinney will bring to Ogilvy North America.

■ ***Congrats on your appointment at Ogilvy as global chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer and chief people officer for North America. How do you feel about it?***

Thank you. My life's purpose is to truly inspire and motivate. I see my role as being one focused on unlocking doors and propelling people towards their purpose so they can unlock their full potential. This is personal for me for a range of reasons, starting with the fact that I grew up as a kid with a stutter. Now I'm looking forward to using my voice to give voice to others, advocating for talent across this legendary company.



Ogilvy names James Kinney as global chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer

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■ ***It seems like a pretty long title. Could you elaborate on what this role entails?***

Yes, the two titles can be a mouth full, but I've led many organisations in human resources as well as through inclusive efforts and what you learn is if diversity is siloed as a sideshow then it will simply be that. Our world and employees demand the best, and they deserve it. To give it to them the People and DE&I functions need to be linked in a meaningful way -- and different companies can take different approaches to doing that.

“ If 2020 has taught us anything, innovation is massively required in terms of thinking about the way we approach work and the workplace. ”

The future of work requires incredible disruption and creativity and that is what we will do at Ogilvy.

■ ***How and when did this come about? When do you take up this position?***

Ogilvy started going through a period of change last summer after Andy Main became Global CEO. His jump from a consultancy to an agency peaked a lot of people's interest, including mine. I believe you can either be disrupted or be a disruptor.

Andy is looking to harness the best of Ogilvy, but also to innovate. He not only wants to lead Ogilvy into the future but the industry as well. Ultimately, it was a difficult decision to leave my previous employer as they have an incredible team, but my conversations with everyone at Ogilvy made me realise this was an opportunity too consequential to pass up. I'm excited about working with Andy, Devika, and Jag to make sure Ogilvy seizes this moment.

■ ***What excites you most about joining Ogilvy North America?***

The creativity, EQ, and intelligence of the organisation is just incredible. It's like joining the New York Yankees, the Dallas Cowboys or FC Barcelona.

■ ***Your life's work is centred around propelling people towards their purpose and unlocking doors, so they can achieve their full potential. What unique approach will you bring to Ogilvy?***

Most organisations focus on hard benefits and old thinking suggests that it is good enough. 401K, insurance, PTO etc. Certainly, these items are needed, but the future of work and Ogilvy is about truly surrounding and supporting people to transform personally and professionally. The workplace tends to still be in the 1990's while folks wake up to Calm, Peloton, and Instagram.

“ The workplace is now a lifestyle brand and experience. ”

We have the opportunity to become the Lululemon or the Tesla of work so to speak. Ogilvy works with its clients to create incredible employee experiences, and I'm eager to work with teams throughout Ogilvy and WPP to make sure we do the same for our company.

■ ***You've had quite an impressive career spanning over 18 years. What do you love most about your career? What is your proudest moment? What I love most about my career is that I've proven that no matter your background - you can be Hispanic, Asian, South Asian, Black, Gay, have a disability, grow up poor, or have a non-traditional path - you can still achieve your dreams. My proudest moment is joining Ogilvy.***

■ ***What is your biggest motivation in life?***

Two things, my son and the potential I see to have a positive impact through my work at a global company like Ogilvy.

■ ***What advice do you have for organisations when it comes to managing diversity and inclusion in the workplace?***

Don't follow what you think is required. Checking a box will keep you in that box. Diversity is a judicial, economic, creative, and social science.

■ ***Covid-19 has certainly changed our lives forever. What approach should business leaders take going forward in this global crisis?***

Use the Covid-19 pandemic as an opportunity to destroy and break your old workplace and the systems that stifled innovation and equity. It was built on limited thinking anyway.

“ Take the time now to reinvent – from how we think about mental health, growth and learning, creativity, diversity,

physical space, and more. ”

What if we invested in people like sports stars and gave them an unlimited platform to shine? Imagine how that would change things? We should start with one question. What's possible? And then challenge ourselves to push further.

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