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Overland- Tandberg marks 40th year ringing bell for D&I

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Eric Kelly,
chairman and CEO,
Overland-Tandberg Inc.



BUILDING GLOBAL INTELLECT

Overland-Tandberg
celebrates 40th anniversary
with new initiative to
expand D&I

BY TONYA MCMURRAY

Feric Kelly, chairman and CEO of Overland-Tandberg Inc., believes technology can be key to expanding economic opportunity for minority communities by driving the expansion of diversity and inclusion initiatives on a global basis. As the global technology company celebrates its 40th anniversary, it is launching an initiative — Bridge 2 Technologies — to put that belief into practice.

Overland-Tandberg launched the Bridge 2 Technologies initiative in February when it brought more than 50 minority business, nonprofit and education leaders to ring the closing bell at the NASDAQ MarketSite in New York City's Times Square in honor of both its milestone anniversary and Black History Month.

"It was exciting for me to see it come together," Kelly said. "Before we went on the stage, the excitement and electricity were off the charts. It has never happened before to have a diverse group of 50-plus people ringing the NASDAQ bell for Black History Month. And now, NASDAQ has said it wants to do it every year."

Following the bell ringing, Overland-Tandberg hosted a leadership forum titled "Global Intellect: Education, Pipeline, Non-Profit, Economic Equality and Technology." The event was attended

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by leaders in business, government, education and the nonprofit sector from around the world. It focused on ways to bridge the digital divide, develop the workforce of the future and improve economic equality.

Kelly had a blunt message for those attending: Technology companies can do more to support global diversity and inclusion initiatives.

“Technology companies are really good at building technology and platforms to solve problems,” he said. “We’ve done that with Uber [Technologies Inc.]. We’ve done that with LinkedIn [Corp.]. We’ve done that with Airbnb [Inc.]. We’ve done that with a number of areas where technology is the accelerator for strategic initiatives. We haven’t built the technologies to be the accelerator or the platform to advance diversity and inclusion initiatives.”

He points to statistics that show despite many years and significant financial investment, the numbers of minorities in leadership positions have not expanded much. And that, Kelly said, limits the ability of companies to address issues of diversity and inclusion adequately.

“You need a group of people who understand the problem in order to develop the solution,” he said. “You don’t have the people around the table at the C-suite level or the board level that really understand the problem, so it makes it difficult to develop the solution.”

GLOBAL INTELLECT

Building the capacity to understand and solve problems that limit diversity and inclusion initiatives centers on what Kelly refers to as “global intellect,” something he identified early in his career as an executive at Conner Peripherals Inc., the company that invented the 2.5-inch disk drive used in laptops. He was charged with developing the company’s European business plan.

“I flew to Scotland to roll it out and realized it was a horrible plan,” Kelly said. “That was my first realization that building a plan in San Jose right in the heart of Silicon Valley does not get you prepared for understanding how to do business globally. So, I started thinking about my views and vision on what global intellect is all about. When people started talking about diversity and inclusion, to me, it was just a subset of global intellect.”

To launch the Bridges 2 Technologies effort at the NASDAQ forum, Overland-Tandberg invited executives from Fortune 25 companies committed to diversity efforts including JPMorgan Chase & Co.; nonprofits such as the National CARES Mentoring Movement; organizations such as the National Minority Supplier Diversity Council, the U.S. Black Chambers Inc. and Billion Dollar Roundtable Inc. that seek to drive diversity efforts; and presidents from leading universities such as Morgan State University and San Jose State University.

“We were trying to make sure we had a complete view of all the different stakeholders,” Kelly said. “We have to understand the issues from their lens in order to develop a comprehensive solution.”

The goal of Bridge 2 Technologies is to bring together a cross section of executives and thought leaders from around the world to address issues such as the digital divide, the workforce gap, economic inequality and the lack of capital and mentorship to fuel business growth. Through the initiative, Kelly hopes to build a global network of companies that value diversity and inclusion and a framework to help students, professionals, managers, executives, board members and business owners benefit from diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Overland-Tandberg will host a second summit in September 2020 with a target of 300 leaders coming together to continue the discussions started in New York.

A 40-YEAR JOURNEY

Kelly said Overland-Tandberg’s 40 years of success, conducting business in more than 90 countries, and a diverse executive team put it in an ideal position to lead the Bridge 2 Technologies program.

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Overland-Tandberg began in 1980 as Overland Storage Inc. on San Diego’s Overland Avenue. The company invented tape libraries to help companies create long-term archives of critical business data. Its business has expanded to include hybrid cloud solutions, data management and protection and information technology infrastructure. The company now has offices in 90 countries and supports large global corporations, the U.S. government and small to medium-sized businesses.

The company went public in 1997 and made several key acquisitions over the years, including the 2014 purchase of Tandberg Data Corp., which resulted in the company’s name change

to Overland-Tandberg.

Kelly joined Overland-Tandberg's board in 2008 and later assumed the role of chairman and CEO. In 2018, with the support of the company's board and key investors, he decided to take the company private to become a minority-owned business enterprise and expand its focus on diversity and inclusion.

"We had the opportunity to change the landscape by having a well-established black-owned technology company," he said. "It was not a startup tech company, but a company that has a brand on a global stage, a company with the footprint to be able to launch our global Bridge 2 Technologies [program]."

Kelly said some of the factors that have helped Overland-Tandberg succeed and continue to grow are remaining innovative and effectively navigating the transition to a global business.

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY

With the Bridge 2 Technologies initiative, he hopes to replicate the factors he believes led to his success in the industry — most importantly, mentors who helped prepare him for the business world and sponsors who helped bring him into key positions. The Bridge 2 Technologies initiative has four core pillars: corporate responsibility; a global, connected pipeline to help expand opportunities; mentorship for small businesses and entrepreneurs; and education.

Kelly said a focus on education and connecting with historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) — as well as with other educational institutions with large populations of diverse candidates — are vital to helping prepare minority candidates for the workforce. He recalled a recent presentation a large technology company gave to university presidents outlining what the company saw as necessary soft skills for those entering the workforce.

"They identified characteristics such as adaptability and persuasion," Kelly said. "But the soft skills for a diverse candidate are distinctively different. Soft skills for a diverse aspirant are meant to address what you do in a professional environment. What is the proper business attire when I attend the meeting? What is the language and tone I need to use? When business etiquette is refer-

enced, what does that mean?"

Kelly cited a recent study that identified three factors that determine the likelihood of business success: household income of the family you grew up in, the ZIP code you live in, and whether you went to the right schools.

"If you hit those three points, you have a 12 times better chance to acquire the job," he said.

Candidates in underserved areas don't have those advantages, and that can mean they lack critical knowledge about the unwritten rules of the business world, Kelly said. For example, people who have never experienced a country club may not know that when a company off-site event is scheduled at the local country club, they can't wear jeans and will need a collared shirt.

"They don't get promoted, or they don't get hired because they don't fit in," he said. "They don't know why they don't fit in. They've taken physics. They've completed all the engineering classes. They earned their MBA. But no one ever informed them as to the unspoken rules of the professional work environment."

Kelly hopes the Bridge 2 Technologies initiative will result in robust partnerships that better prepare candidates while helping to break down the barriers that often prevent diverse businesses from succeeding.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT 40 YEARS

Overland-Tandberg hopes to continue to be a leader in those efforts, as it also focuses on its core business.

Overland-Tandberg's strategic plan is to be a \$1 billion company within the next few years, he said. Reaching that mark will allow the company to increase its ability to support centers of excellence — inner-city programs such as the National CARES Mentoring Movement and other initiatives that promote economic equality and diversity and inclusion around the world.

"There's no limit to what we can accomplish," Kelly said. "We're poised now as a diverse company to extend our growth and innovation for the next 40 years. We're going to be a bit larger, a bit stronger and we're going to have a lot more fun." ■

ABOUT ERIC KELLY

Hometown: Oakland, California

First job: IBM sales rep

Last business book read:

"Unapologetically Ambitious: Take Risks, Break Barriers, and Create Success on Your Own Terms," by Shellye Archambeau (Advance reader's copy, available on pre-order through Amazon.)

Favorite leadership quote:

"Strategy without execution is a daydream and execution without strategy is a nightmare."

