

# Black History Month Leadership Series



## Colin Ryan

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### FUN FACT

I am a 2x All-American Tennis player, but working hard at getting my golf handicap down to scratch.

#### What inspired you to get into the finance industry?

When I was coming out of college I had no idea what I wanted to do professionally. I majored in Mathematics and Economics, and a career in business/finance seemed like the logical next step. What I really wanted was a challenging environment that let my competitive nature be an asset – I'll work as hard as I need to not to just get the job done, but to make sure the outcome is a win. But what has kept me in Finance for 20 years has been the people I have met along the way at both Citi and throughout the Street.

#### What does Black History Month mean to you?

Black History Month is a time for people of every background to reflect on and remember great achievements of Black excellence. It is also a call to acknowledge the tremendous obstacles overcome throughout history and to realize that there will always be more work to do to maintain societal progress.

#### How do you help support DEI initiatives at your organization?

I support DEI initiatives with every chance I get! I think it's an amazing opportunity to work in a group unique to every other institution on the street. Citi shows sincere commitment to sustaining momentum with DEI initiatives by having a dedicated team (DFIG) to integrate our goals and advocacy to decrease the racial wealth gap. We are finding strategic solutions in our businesses and through our clients to integrate DEI in how we do business. We have shown that our efforts can be additive to the economics and continue to raise the standards on how impact can be achieved through business with our diverse counterparties.

Outside of the day-to-day job, I co-lead our Black heritage inclusion group (FORWARD) within the Markets group at Citi. The goal of this is to grow the Black population across Markets while also developing and supporting existing Black talent. Citi Markets FORWARD focuses on recruiting, retaining and engaging Black professionals and work to enhance our diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Additionally, I try to be a supporting ally for other inclusion groups around the firm.

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## What can industry leaders do to increase diversity in finance?

1. The most important factor is to bring financial literacy into early stages of education and continue through current employment. A career in finance needs to be a realized possibility at a much earlier stage in the education process – the competition for talent across industries is strong .
2. Hire, advocate, and support diverse individuals in the finance industry. Advocacy, along with accountability, plays a key role in retention for the industry.
3. Increase efforts to promote qualified diverse leaders - the superman effect is real, you have to be able to see diverse leaders to believe that it's something you can accomplish.

## What keeps you motivated to continue to grow in this profession?

The sources of motivation have changed quite a bit over time. At the start of my career I was motivated by personal success and competition – I wanted to be the best at whatever I was assigned. It was a time of education and growth to perfect my craft, and I had a strong focus on navigating the professional experience. Midway through my career (thus far) has been more focused on things like “Market Share” and upward organizational movement – I was trying to find balance between excellence in my trading roles and expanding my product knowledge so that I was well-positioned to advance in my career. The more recent stages of my career are focused on trying to make an impact on the direction of my world-class organization. I have been able to do this through my role in the Diverse Financial Institutions Group and through the recruitment and retention efforts here at the firm.

## Is there anything else you'd like to add about how we can all work to make the finance industry more diverse, equitable, and inclusive?

I love allies and advocates, but what we really need are accomplices. Folks that are ready and willing to get involved in the messy process of “change” where it's needed.

## This year's theme for "Black History Month is African American and the Arts": In what ways do you believe the arts can serve as a powerful platform for promoting diversity, inclusion, and social change, and how have you utilized this in your own leadership?

Black art and artists, specifically, have had a decorated history of success and achievement in literature, cinema, music, painting, and more. It's through early adaptation to the arts that this history of Black excellence can be experienced and encouraged to be a part of everyone's lives. I'm fortunate to have a partner that works in the Arts. Over the years, she has been able to expose me to a number of charitable organizations and foundations that focus on bringing the arts into younger education. Like most things in life, it's clear that early exposure to something is the key to having that activity involved in someone's life at later stages, and I hope that I can continue working with kids to keep art (and Black art) in the mix.

Through Markets FORWARD (discussed above) we have been able to host several events that incorporate the Arts with retention efforts for the Black Heritage community. One highlight was at the ACA Galleries in NYC, which featured work by Black Artists. Another Highlight was an event featuring the producer of Oscar nominated *Till* where we organized a fireside chat discussing the evolution of the movie dedicated in memory of Mamie Till's life and legacy.

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## Can you tell us a bit about your firm's DEI initiatives?

Citi's firmwide strategic pillars focus on the following:

- Manage & Develop Diverse Talent by continuing to recruit and retain diverse talent and develop strong Next Gen talent pipelines.
- Foster an Inclusive Culture by developing inclusive leaders and empower allies and Employee Networks
- Drive Accountability by holding leaders accountable for working towards achieving new aspirational representation goals and fostering an inclusive work environment
- Engage Clients by deepening client, customer, and supplier relationships to enhance marketplace opportunities

Larger initiatives have played out over the past few years and have been centered around issues like the gender pay gap. The group I currently work for, Diverse Financial Institutions Group (DFIG), was founded out [Citi's Action for Racial Equity](#), which is a multi-billion dollar pledge to assist in closing the racial wealth gap. This group, managed by Harold Butler, is the business engine behind how we partner with Minority Depository Institutions, Diverse and Veteran Broker Dealers, and Diverse Asset Managers to create both impact and revenue for all parties involved.

*This interview has been edited for clarity.*