

2023 ISA Innovation Impact Award: Building a Diverse and Inclusive Culture at Vallen with Employee Resource Groups

Introduction to Vallen's ERGs

In today's competitive market for top talent, companies must offer employees more than a good paycheck and benefits. Workplace culture is often more important than compensation for attracting and retaining employees. People want to feel connected and cared for by their employers. Shared values, strong relationships, and opportunities to develop professionally and personally rank high among the factors that influence individuals to work for a company and remain engaged and productive.

Vallen has made a commitment to developing a pipeline for talent—in particular, for women and minorities who are under-represented in the distribution industry, and for veterans who are entering the corporate workplace after their service to our country. The creation of internal Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) has helped Vallen shape its culture into one that is more inclusive and welcoming of associates from all walks of life.



VICKIE is Vallen's employee resource group focused on developing women within the organization. Members include women and their allies throughout all roles and levels of responsibility. VICKIE stands for Voices Inspiring Change, Knowledge, Innovation and Empowerment. Members are active in supporting the pillars of the group—Learn, Nourish, Care, Celebrate, Innovate, and Give Back—to create value for Vallen and build a supportive environment to retain and promote women, attract diverse talent and build tomorrow's leaders.



BERG is Vallen's Black Employee Resource Group, which supports and encourages Black employees in their career development in order to bring greater success for Vallen. The group's name and logo of an iceberg represent the untapped potential of diverse associates and their contributions to the greater organization. Membership in BERG is open to all Vallen associates, with the goal of building relationships that enhance understanding, equity, and allyship.



SALUTE is Vallen's resource group for veterans, with pillars representing Support, Attention, Learning, Unity, Training, and Enlistment with the goal of not only supporting our own veteran associates but also recruiting veterans and disabled veterans for professional positions and opportunities.

Each ERG shares the goal to strengthen Vallen's culture by creating bonds among like-minded team members while recognizing that our differences bring us new perspectives and viewpoints that help us grow. Vallen's leadership recognizes that in order to be successful in the coming years, businesses must reflect the diversity found in their customers and communities.

As ISA and its members continue to lead the channel forward, this is foundational: diversity and inclusion must become ingrained in the day-to-day operations and values of successful organizations.





Forging Connections to Build Strong, Successful Teams

Vallen's Employee Resource Groups, known as ERGs, are designed to help associates connect and grow their careers, building a base of supportive relationships. ERGs provide a safe space to share ideas, gain professional knowledge and leadership experience, and be part of a community of people who learn from and lean on each other. Allies are not only welcome, but essential to the success of each group.

But these groups do much more than build up those who choose to join and participate. It's been shown that innovation flourishes in organizations where employees feel they are in a safe and trusted space.

Vallen has three ERGs: VICKIE, a women's resource group; BERG, a Black employee resource group; and SALUTE, a group to support and recruit veterans and those in the Guard or Reserves.

This podcast is a conversation with Vallen associates who have joined and gotten involved with each group, sharing why they chose to join and what they've gained along the way.

- Hosted by Ken Coats, Board member for SALUTE and member and ally of all three ERGs
- Alexis Darden, Human Resources Generalist; member of BERG and VICKIE
- Scyld Gayler, Director, Implementation; member of VICKIE; U.S. Army veteran and member of SALUTE
- Jennifer Anweiler, DC Customer Service Coordinator-Chicago; member of VICKIE, BERG, and SALUTE
- Stan Cloudy, Service Area Manager, Vallen Safety Services; Board Member of BERG, Outreach Committee
- Anna Neack, Corporate Trainer; U.S. Army veteran and member of SALUTE



Listen to the [podcast here](#).





Here's How it Started

In late 2019, a group of women at Vallen came together to form a steering committee that would plan and guide the creation of Vallen's first Employee Resource Group. Aware of the hurdles faced by industrial distributors regarding diversity and the disparity of women in leadership positions, the committee was charged by Vallen CEO Chuck

Delph and executive leadership to develop a mission and programming with the goal to advance women associates and provide opportunities to develop new leaders within the company.

Led by founding members Joyce Lansdale, VP Industrial Sales; Sonia Timmons, VP Finance; and Kim Garrett, SVP Enterprise Effectiveness—the committee identified six core pillars as focus areas: Nourish, Care, Celebrate, Learn, Innovate, and Give Back. They developed a mission statement, a charter, and a name for the group. The name **VICKIE**

represents Voices Inspiring Change, Knowledge, Innovation and Empowerment. The new ERG launched in January 2020, and they invited all Vallen associates—women and allies—to join and participate in a virtual kick-off event.

Since that time, VICKIE has created events and programs that support professional and personal development, including workshops on building your career, positive body image, support for breast cancer awareness, and more.

Serving on VICKIE's board has expanded opportunities for associates to develop leadership skills and build relationships within the organization. The Board of VICKIE is currently led by Caroline Harris, who also serves on the ISA Emerging Leaders Committee. The VICKIE Board includes 13 women leaders and four Advisory Board members.

Membership currently totals 133, including women associates as well as men who have joined as allies in support of women colleagues. Vallen Canada has also formed a chapter for Vallen VICKIE.



Programs, events, and outreach have focused on the core pillars. Click the links below to watch videos and learn more:

[*Mental Health Awareness Month—A collaboration with VICKIE, BERG, and SALUTE \(2023\)*](#)

[*Sweat for a Cause: Girls on the Run \(2023\)*](#)

[*Love Your Body 2.0 Series \(2023\)*](#)

[*Mentoring Pilot Program—A collaboration with VICKIE and BERG \(2022\)*](#)

[*Celebrating Founders Day \(2022\)*](#)

[*International Women's Day with guest speaker Megs Gelfgot \(2021\)*](#)

[*The Gratitude Project \(2021\)*](#)

[*Breast Cancer Awareness "Survivor Stories" \(2020 and 2021\)*](#)

[*VICKIE Founder Stories with Kim Garrett, Joyce Lansdale, and Sonia Timmons \(2020\)*](#)

MISSION

Vallen's VICKIE is an employee resource group whose ultimate goal is to increase the number of professional women employed by and contributing to the long-term success of Vallen, while also supporting and encouraging current Vallen women associates to reach higher levels in the organization.

We will accomplish this goal by helping provide an inclusive workplace that encourages women to be recruited by Vallen for professional positions and opportunities. We will provide support for women at Vallen to develop their skills and foster a workplace that retains and promotes women to high levels in the organization.



Growing Diversity

Diversity and inclusion are foundational to Channel 2.0. With changing demographics within the end user customer base and the general population, distributors must also reflect those changes in order to continue to grow and thrive.

Vallen's Employee Resource Groups not only develop current associates, but they are essential to attracting new talent to Vallen. With industry projections for as much as 25% of the current workforce to retire in the next 5-10 years, attracting and retaining valuable employees is critical.

Building on the success of VICKIE, CEO Chuck Delph urged Sonia Timmons to put together a team to lead the creation of a second Vallen ERG—one designed to support Black associates at Vallen as well as engage allies. “When I met with Chuck, he stressed the importance for Vallen of recruiting and retaining talent,” said Sonia. “This community will be a place where we support our fellow teammates through engaged accountability, and help the company reach its goal. In turn, the company will help the community.”

Sonia invited ten Vallen associates to begin planning, including Black associates and allies. The group chose the name [BERG](#) (Black Employee Resource Group), envisioning a logo using an iceberg to represent the untapped potential of diverse associates and their contributions to the company.

BERG officially launched in September of 2021, and since that time the ERG has held educational and cultural awareness events and panel discussions, community outreach and volunteer opportunities, and is developing partnerships with HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) to expand recruiting efforts.

Membership in BERG is open to all Vallen associates, with the goal of building relationships that enhance understanding, equity, and allyship. Current membership totals 78 with 12 serving on the Board.

MISSION

Vallen's BERG (Black Employee Resource Group) promotes diversity and multiculturalism through engagement, education, allyship, and community involvement. We are committed to impacting Vallen's success through networking, professional development, mentoring, and leadership opportunities while enhancing customer, supplier, and community relationships.



Click the links below to watch videos and learn more about past BERG events and outreach activities:

[Black History Month Celebration - hosted by BERG member Alexis Darden \(2023\)](#)

[Celebrating One Year - A year in review \(2022\)](#)

[School Supply Drive, in partnership with VICKIE \(2022\)](#)

[Juneteenth Panel Discussion - hosted by BERG member Jackie Calhoun, with panelist and BERG Board member Tracey Lane \(2022\)](#)

[Veteran's Comfort Kits, with the Red Cross \(2021 and 2022\)](#)

[Finding Your Voice, a panel discussion with BERG members \(2021\)](#)



We SALUTE Our Veterans

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, approximately 200,000 men and women leave U.S. military service every year and return to life as civilians. Veterans bring many positive qualities to the workplace, including proven leadership readiness, experience working in diverse teams, strong performance and work ethic, and more. For many, the transition can also bring challenges. A veteran-focused ERG can help provide support and resources to those who have bravely served our country and deserve every opportunity to put their skills to work.

In 2022, CEO Chuck Delph reached out to Michael Moore, Director of Business Development, asking him to lead a group to form a veteran-focused ERG. As a veteran who served a 26-year military career, Michael readily accepted the challenge and brought in 22 Vallen associates—both veterans and enthusiastic allies—to create a mission, charter, and core pillars. Named SALUTE for its core pillars—Support, Attention, Learning, Unity, Training, and Enlistment—the goals of the new ERG include not only supporting Vallen’s veteran associates but also recruiting veterans and disabled veterans for professional positions and opportunities.

Vallen officially launched [SALUTE](#) as its third ERG in April 2023, with Michael serving as founder and Board advisor, and Janine McManus, SVP Human Resources, serving as executive sponsor.

The group’s focus is simple: for Vallen to be known as a military-friendly company where the core pillars resonate with veterans and their families as well as all members of Vallen. “SALUTE is a place where we can learn more about veterans, listen to stories, gain insight, and allow others to share,” said Michael. “It is also a place to train and mentor Vallen’s veterans to reach their fullest potential, and enlist veterans and those serving in the National Guard and Reserves to bring in the skills and discipline that are beneficial to Vallen.” The 16-member Board includes veterans and allies committed to the mission. Only two months after its launch, SALUTE membership totals 114 and is steadily growing.

MISSION

Vallen’s SALUTE is a veteran-focused, employee resource group whose goal is to provide for veterans and disabled veterans through Support, Attention, Learning, Unity, Training, and Enlistment of new veteran and new disabled veteran associates, contributing to the long-term success of Vallen.

We will accomplish this mission by providing support to all veterans that will aid in adjustment as well as highlight their current military skills and support the development of additional skills to provide growth and retention within the organization. We will provide a workplace that encourages veterans and disabled veterans to be recruited by Vallen for professional positions and opportunities.



Click the links below to watch videos and learn about SALUTE events and outreach:

[Flag Day Ceremony](#)
(June 2023)

[Memorial Day Commemoration](#)
(May 2023)

[Houston Military Recruiting Event](#)
(June 2023)

- Collected recruitment contacts and established networking among recruiters in our industry, including the United States Chamber of Commerce

[MRO Americas Trade Show](#)
(April 2023)

- SALUTE’s public debut generated interest both commercially and from a recruitment perspective
- Vallen had the opportunity to bid on new work as a result of this event

[Statement of Support for the Guard and Reserve](#)
(March 2023)

Upcoming Activities and Impact

Each ERG has plans for programs and activities throughout 2023 and beyond aligning with their mission, as well as collaborative programs that support causes that affect a broader base.

BERG School Supply Drive Supports Early Education

BERG is expanding a School Supply Drive to provide Title 1 schools near our distribution centers with supplies to ensure children have the tools they need to learn. BERG's Outreach Committee is presenting partnership opportunities to supplier partners to participate in this event as well as the third annual Red Cross Veterans Comfort Kits, in partnership with SALUTE.

The 2023 School Supply drive launches in July and runs through August.



VICKIE Panel Boosts Career Development

VICKIE is planning a return of their popular event "Take Control of Your Career" in October 2023. This year's event will include a panel presentation open to all Vallen associates, followed by a members-only lunch and learn for further discussion. VICKIE will also raise awareness for Breast Cancer Prevention in October and partner with SALUTE in September for Suicide Prevention Awareness.



In 2022, panelists included VP Industrial Sales Joyce Lansdale, SVP Human Resources Janine McManus, VP Finance Sonia Timmons, and SVP Enterprise Effectiveness Kim Garrett (clockwise from top left).

SALUTE Challenge Coin Recognizes Core Values

SALUTE has developed a recognition program based on a military tradition of a "challenge coin." The Challenge coin tradition spans a century and is meant to establish pride, esprit de corps, improve morale, unite, and recognize hard work and excellence. SALUTE decided to bring this tradition to Vallen using the six pillars as the basis for recognizing an associate who represents SALUTE's guiding values.

Michael Moore presented CEO Chuck Delph with SALUTE's first challenge coin.



Together, Vallen’s three ERGs will host an opening reception at our upcoming Sales Conference in August, sharing the goals and plans of each group and introducing a charitable 5K event planned for the next morning. Proceeds from the event will go to support the nonprofit Operation Stand Down Tennessee, which connects veterans and their families with comprehensive services including careers, community, and crisis services.

New hires at Vallen have shared that finding information about VICKIE, BERG, and SALUTE, as well as our Vallen Cares (community engagement) efforts on [our company website](#) has been important as they considered joining Vallen. We know that alignment with an organization’s values and culture is proven to be a determining factor in many new recruits’ decision to accept an offer, as well as their future satisfaction and success in the role. DE&I efforts are highlighted on Vallen’s [recruiting site](#), with a page dedicated to our support of [military and veterans](#).

Once hired, associates learn about Vallen’s ERGs during onboarding as well as through communications, newsletters, and events. In 2023, VICKIE, BERG, and SALUTE held a joint membership campaign to showcase each ERGs impact and plans for the future.

“For me this has always been about creating the right culture for all of our team, not just some of our team,” said Chuck Delph. “With the continued challenges in the labor market and Vallen being a people-centered value proposition, we must create a community and company that all team members see as a place to thrive, prosper, and feel their contributions matter.”

SALUTE, VICKIE, AND BERG are committed to working collaboratively to build community within Vallen as well as to support and lift up the communities where we live and work.



CHUCK DELPH
CEO, VALLEN NORTH AMERICA



Diversity drives innovation.

Vallen is committed to creating a work environment where equity is expected and where our associates trust they can be authentic and celebrated for their differences. As a service organization, our greatest differentiator rests with the individuals who choose to become part of our team. Our ability to innovate and prove our value is strengthened by inclusion.

This creates opportunity for all—building a better tomorrow, starting today.

