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Diversity and inclusion practices to incorporate in your company

EARSA JACKSON
Guest Contributor

At this year's Legal Diversity and Talent Management Forum in New York, I sat in an enormous ballroom filled with representatives of companies, large and small, from all over the country, serving every demographic and community imaginable. We were all focused on the answer to one seemingly simple question that has plagued corporate America for decades – how do we improve our company's diversity?

It hit me that, after almost 20 years of discussing the business case for diversity, the conversation is finally centered on actionable steps to cultivate a more diverse and inclusive environment. No longer should any company interested in profitability need to ask if diversity and inclusion are imperatives. If a business is still entertaining this dialogue, the company is likely miles behind its competitors who have figured out the business case for having employees who reflect



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Earsa Jackson is the co-chair of Clark Hill Strasburger's diversity committee.

the diverse client base served.

The following steps, which are a culmination of insights from some of the brightest, diverse individuals I've had the pleasure of collaborating with and ideas discussed at the forum, can help businesses of all types achieve true progress in diversifying their most important asset – their people.

Be intentional.

More companies can benefit from individuals simply stand-

ing up and owning an inclusivity solution in addition to their regular duties. A diversity and inclusion professional from a large national company shared her experience about moving the needle by deciding to create a pipeline program that essentially pre-qualified candidates. I recommended creating an actual brand around my firm's Minority Attorney Group – and THRIVE became more than pretty colors and a

funky logo. That new branding created energy around our diversity conversation that has, in turn, sparked even more candid discussions about access to special projects, exposure to senior management, true mentorship, etc.

In its 2018 “America’s Best Cities” report, Resonance Consultancy Ltd. ranked these metropolitans as the top 10. Each slide also includes the city’s rank in the following categories: place (environment), product (housing/education), programming (entertainment/culture), people (diversity), prosperity (economics) and promotion (online engagement).

Implement a top-down approach.

Don’t silo your diversity and inclusion efforts. To be effective, diversity and inclusion must be central to the enterprise. Leadership, not just the diversity committee, must embrace and promote inclusion as an integral part of the company’s culture. For example, at Clark Hill Strasburger’s Houston office, partner-in-charge Betsy Kamin, who also chairs our women’s initiative BOLD, is unapologetic in her efforts to create a diverse workplace. She proactively seeks out women and racial minority attorney candidates and as a result, the Houston office is the most racially diverse in the firm and better reflects today’s global business community.

Start somewhere.

To borrow from a famous quote from Dr. Martin Luther

King Jr., “If you can’t fly, run. If you can’t run, walk. If you can’t walk, crawl, but by all means keep moving.” If you don’t have a diversity and inclusion strategy, develop one. If you already have one in place, take a deep breath and pick one area to address per quarter. Involve your managers and department heads in the conversation. Listen to them. Share articles, sound bites, and podcasts that offer a variety of perspectives. Make your conversation a visible part of your culture. Don’t get discouraged. Keep pushing for progress and demand that others around you commit to the same thing.

Begin at the beginning.

Recognize that implicit bias can influence how recruiting is handled long before an individual is hired. Evaluate how and where your company communicates new opportunities. Assess what communities your initial candidate pool includes. Consider redacting names on resumes reviewed to encourage an experience-focused assessment of candidates.

Consistently promote inclusion internally and externally.

Having a stated commitment to diversity is a great first step, but regularly delivering messages of inclusivity really solidifies that commit-

ment in the minds of both employees and clients. This promotion can be as simple as monthly internal and/or external emails or social media posts that educate employees on significant holidays, or as elaborate as developing an event series featuring high profile speakers. Seek out and participate in industry awards that focus on diversity. Use those metrics as standards by which to begin measuring your company’s commitment. Celebrate positive outcomes internally and externally, and consider any shortcomings as areas to prioritize for improvement.

Always learn.

No single diversity and inclusion program is perfect. Remember to appreciate progress wherever you see it, whether within your own company or from your competition. Take notes on what works, what doesn’t, and how your own program could grow from others’ input or experience.

After all, at the heart of it, the mission of celebrating diversity and inclusion is to learn from one another – to develop best practices in both business and life that drive us all onward and upward.

Earsa Jackson is a partner and the co-chair of Clark Hill Strasburger’s diversity committee.

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