

Diversity and Inclusion: Homing In

November 9, 2012

By [Laura R. Garger](#)

I've re-read our diversity blog and have been struck by the thread that has woven its way into the postings: the doing of diversity, the doing of inclusion. In other words, what actions does the legal profession need to take to be truly diverse and inclusive? Well, my Galician grandmother used.....

I've re-read our diversity blog and have been struck by the thread that has woven its way into the postings: the *doing* of diversity, the *doing* of inclusion. In other words, what *actions* does the legal profession need to take to be truly diverse and inclusive?

Well, my Galician grandmother used to say: *Caridad buena, la que empieza por mi casa y no por la ajena*, which roughly translates as "Charity begins at home." Diversity and inclusion do, too. But perhaps "the legal profession" is too grand a home, too broad a concept for me to tackle here. So I'm going to begin by homing in on a narrower concept: "law firms."

Law firms nationwide are working on becoming more diverse and inclusive so that all their attorneys can develop to their full potential. However, as is the case with all work-in-progress, there is doing and redoing; there is determination and hesitation; there is a step forward and two steps back. But overall law firms are—with varying levels of commitment and success—strategizing (or scrambling) to apply diversity and inclusion best practices.

Some law firms hire a chief diversity officer and designate a senior partner to lead their diversity and inclusion efforts and avoid such pitfalls as a diversity committee staffed primarily by women and minorities. However, they forget to formulate a clear vision and to put a strategic plan in place, so they end up recognizing what failure looks like (possibly owing to an unfortunate familiarity) but remain clueless about what constitutes diversity and inclusion success.

Some law firms mandate top-down diversity and inclusion training as a way to build awareness among attorneys. But they fail to identify and unequivocally articulate what type of awareness they want to raise and to what heights.

Some law firms gather data about why attorneys are leaving. They put systems in place to retain talent and use national research studies to discover the often hidden barriers that may be causing their high attrition rate. But when faced with the data that they have gathered, they shake their heads in consternation as if the data simply weren't true—as if it *couldn't* be true.

Other law firms understand the need to review and tweak their balanced-hours policy because they want to keep their talent. But later, they have misgivings about the financial viability of reduced hours (What about overhead? What if *everyone* wants to work reduced hours?) and seem flummoxed by how to realistically control costs while offering flexibility without penalty.

Still other law firms carry out exit interviews, participate in minority job fairs, expand their recruitment efforts, measure retention initiatives, and track client access.

Many law firms *do* all of the above and more.

Law firms are trying, decidedly and tentatively, strategically and haphazardly, but they are trying. And this is a good thing: best practices are meant to be practiced, and practice does make perfect in the long run. So to my mind there is hope despite the hit-and-miss of it all.

In the meantime, while all this *doing* is going on “at the law firm level,” what can we do to incorporate inclusive practices to create a more diverse legal profession?

Let's home in now on individual action—on what each one of *us* can do.

We can each perform actions that support the recruitment of diverse talent, help promote all attorneys, and expand our cultural competence.

Here are samples of specific actions for you to try out:

- Attend an event hosted by a diversity organization or minority bar association and invite clients and potential clients to attend.
- Develop a mentoring relationship with an attorney of a different gender, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.
- Know, understand, and communicate about your firm's diversity and inclusion initiatives.
- Submit one idea to advance your firm's diversity recruiting efforts to the hiring coordinator or HR professional.
- Take a class about a different culture or study a different language.

- Seek out and attend an event or function where you will be in the minority.

Caridad buena, la que empieza por mi casa y no por la ajena.

Perhaps if each of us takes one or two concrete actions on a regular basis, law firms will finally make sustainable strides and truly contribute towards a diverse and inclusive legal profession.

AUTHOR



Laura R. Garger

Of Counsel, Stamford

TOPICS

Diversity and Inclusion