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Diversity Needs More than Numbers

Successful diversity programs require full inclusion.

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I recently had an epiphany about the true essence of diversity. During the past year, I have written articles on the importance of having a diverse legal department and diverse outside counsel. Recently, it dawned on me that although striving for diversity is good, diversity is not meaningful if it does not entail *inclusion*.

The success of diversity efforts is often measured by assessing numbers listed on a sheet of paper. When it comes to determining whether diversity is real, we must look beyond the numbers. If the diverse group cited in the numbers is actually isolated, ignored, dismissed, second-guessed, or excluded from meetings, key assignments and advancement opportunities, then diversity is a sham. Inclusiveness is what truly drives a diversity program.

Think of it in terms of a party. The host invites two groups to attend. The first group, which has the same characteristics as the host, is welcomed with open arms and offered champagne, filet mignon and caviar. The second group is only offered soda and potato chips. The guests in the first group are oblivious to what is happening to the second group because all of their needs are being met. The host is not in tune with what is happening because he/she believes a great thing has been done by extending an invitation to the second group. But it boils down to the perception of the second group. Though invited to the party, they eventually leave feeling unwelcomed and that they were not extended the same level of hospitality.

Some corporate legal departments and law firms are functioning in the same way as the party example. There are certain groups—while invited—that are not automatically extended the same access or opportunities as others. That's not right!

Fostering an inclusive atmosphere requires a conscious effort, awareness, sensitivity and proactivity.

As in-house attorneys, we have to exercise leadership to drive inclusion at the law firms. Many law firms will not do it without our push. Diverse law firm associates often cite being excluded from client meetings, business development opportunities and substantive work assignments. As in-house lawyers, we need to forge a working partnership with our outside counsel on the issue. In-house counsel can start by requiring outside counsel to have the diversity numbers. Then we should make sure that diverse lawyers are staffed on our legal matters in a meaningful way. Where feasible, we should look to include law firm associates in client meetings and strategy sessions. In-house legal departments can further create and provide short-term secondment opportunities to law firm associates that will give them a chance to gain client contact with us and provide them with a hands-on opportunity to learn our business. A working partnership with outside counsel can enable us to work on training and development opportunities for law firm associates that will ultimately enhance the atmosphere of inclusion.

Within our own corporate legal departments, leaders need to take conscious steps to ensure that the workplace is inclusive. This means hearing everyone's opinions, ideas and suggestions equally and providing equal opportunities to diverse attorneys to gain substantive work experience and access to high-profile assignments. Furthermore, inclusion extends to invitations to lunches, golf outings and other informal networking

thumb, if the host invites one, he/she should invite all. This will ensure that people feel they are part of the team.

True diversity brings all to the table and gives them a seat as well. Examine the diversity of your legal department and outside counsel. If diversity is a sham, begin right now to make it meaningful, real and inclusive.

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