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Creating a Cultural Commitment To Drive D&I Programs Forward

To help firms move forward and create the right culture, here are some ideas and lessons learned from companies who have collected and analyzed data to determine the need for change and have designed their D&I strategy to match their business objectives.

By **Ioana Good** | January 05, 2021



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To build more inclusive teams, hire top talent and deliver results, companies have been doubling down on Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) efforts to ensure equal treatment for employees and better work environments. Yet many remain behind the curve on this initiative and much work lies ahead. For instance, only 37 of the companies (<https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/20/us/fortune-500-women-ceos-trnd/index.html>) on this year's Fortune 500 are led by female CEO's and only three of those are women of color. Having the right leadership, teams, plans and programs in place is imperative to establishing a successful, forward thinking, diverse and inclusive culture. To help firms move forward and create the right culture, here are some ideas and lessons learned from companies who have collected and analyzed data to determine the need for change and have designed their D&I strategy to match their business objectives.

S&P Global

At this year's Legal Marketing Association Conference, Pavani Thagirisa, a vice president and associate general counsel at S&P Global, gave a presentation titled "Driving Diversity and Inclusion in the Legal Sector and Beyond." Thagirisa addressed some diversity and inclusion steps and provided examples from many robust programs S&P Global has in place, including the company's investment in women under the #ChangePays initiative which is backed by the latest data on women's economic participation and impact. The company's Diversity Research Council most recently published a study (<https://www.spglobal.com/en/research-insights/featured/somethings-gotta-give>) in partnership with AARP examining the relationship between family-friendly benefits and leave policies in Corporate America and the level of female representation in the workforce and senior management.

In a follow-up interview, Thagirisa points out that, "as leaders in the legal department, it is important to establish a culture of compliance and inclusion while managing and identifying risk. Remembering those values and truly owning the responsibility of being an inclusive partner is critical to leading the way forward."

At S&P Global, the focus on diversity and inclusion is deeply rooted. The company formed its first Employee Resource Group, Women's Initiative for Networking and Success, or WINS, in 2004. Today, employees can participate in any of eight ERGs with scores of regional network chapters globally. Speakers, including academics, politicians, business leaders, and military veterans, are regularly invited to regularly speak about diversity and the struggles they have had to overcome. Employees are encouraged to sign up for as many groups and programs as they want. "We are committed to maintaining a workplace that is inclusive and safe, where our people feel they can bring their whole selves to work.," says Thagirisa who is on the board of Spectrum, S&P Global's LGBTQ+ Employee Resource Group.

Thagirisa credits much of the company's success to strong, forward-thinking senior leadership. "Accountability starts with the right leaders," said Thagirisa. "Our senior leadership has been incredibly progressive, engaging, proactive and responsive."

Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel

Kramer Levin's focus on D&I can trace its roots back to founding partner Arthur Kramer who enlisted the firm's support to incorporate Gay Men's Health Crisis, which his brother Larry Kramer, a pivotal figure in AIDS activism, founded in 1982.

The firm hired its first Diversity Director, Lauren Tapper, nearly 15 years ago, and she still serves in that role today, as well as serves as the firm's Legal Recruiting Director.

Tapper says, "It takes time and prolonged effort to make impactful cultural change, and it takes creativity and commitment." While our D&I focus is rooted in recruitment and retention, it is much more."

One D&I strategy Kramer Levin has found successful is cultivating the intersection of pro bono and diversity. A prime example of this approach is the launch of the firm's Racial Justice Initiative last spring. This initiative pursues pro bono opportunities focused on racial injustice and inequality, including criminal justice reform. More than 120 attorney and staff volunteer are engaged on a variety of projects.

Another D&I strategy Kramer Levin implemented, started about five years ago when the firm began its partnership with the Diversity Lab and participated in their first women-in-law hackathon, which was a competition to generate innovative ideas to close the gender gap in law firms. From the competition, several initiatives were created, and Kramer Levin adopted the "Five Year Moment," in which firms develop and implement a detailed business development support plan that guide lawyers through the demanding two to three years before and after partnership.

According to Jennifer Manton, the firm's Chief Marketing and Business Development Officer, one of the first programs created in support of the "Five Year Moment" was a Women's Business Development Fundamentals Training and Coaching Program. Approximately 30 women have gone through the program and realized success. Now entering its fourth year, the program includes an "alumni group" of past participants who meet a few times year to share insights, successes and support the next generation of women.

"We see the need for D&I every day," says Manton. "It has become a component of everything we do, and we see it in our client buying decisions."

Ball Janik

Ball Janik has long been committed to diversity, and has received many accolades, including being honored as one of Portland Oregon's most diverse law firms by the Portland Business Journal. Damien Hall, a land-use partner at the firm, is focused on the firm's D&I initiatives. He serves on the Urban Land Institute's (ULI) Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Task Force Group, along with other industry leaders, to address systemic racism in the real estate profession. Hall would like to see D&I permeate ULI's decision-making. "This will provide the credibility needed for programming and push information to the commercial real estate community," Hall said.

Hall sees "an increasing number of firm clients are recognizing that diverse organizations are more profitable and are seeking to capitalize by intentionally removing barriers to inclusion." Initial steps often include identifying shortcomings in racial representation within an organization and beginning to identify and eliminate practices and communication patterns that may unintentionally exclude employees, candidates, and contractors that are people of color. "We have to move beyond the random acts of D&I," says Hall. "D&I initiatives are as dynamic and constantly evolving as any other operational objective."

Burr & Forman

In addition to its diversity committee and many affinity groups, the firm has developed the Burr & Forman Pre-Law Program, a paid internship for students of diverse backgrounds who have demonstrated an interest and potential to succeed in law school. The students receive training, mentoring, assistance with their resumes, attend networking events and participate in mock trials. For the first time this year, the firm offered the program virtually and more than doubled its attendance. These experiences also focus on inclusivity and the value of diversity.

"My belief and focus in the diversity space may a little bit different," says Ginger M. Busby who serves as Chair of the firm's Diversity Committee. "Inclusion is the most important aspect of community and it starts early. It is very important that law firms embrace different points of views and perspectives. Personally, I feel law firms will garner greater, sustained success if diversity becomes an integrated part of the culture and everyone feels included and valued. As a collective, diversity makes us stronger."

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