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Locke Lord diversity chief offers practical tips on creating an effective inclusion strategy

Earlier this year, [the Human Rights Campaign](#) (HRC) released its annual [Corporate Equality Index](#) in which a large number of law firms were awarded the title of 'Best Place to Work for LGBTQ Equality'. We [reached out to](#) some of the top-ranking firms, many of which have prominent trademark practices and feature in the [WTR 1000](#), to discuss the initiatives that have earned them that accolade.

Here, Locke Lord LLP's chief diversity and inclusion (D&I) officer, [Paulette Brown](#), shares her insight into how to create an effective strategic plan on D&I, and why law firms should reassess their history and do away with 'exclusive' labels.

Guest analysis

For more than 15 years, Locke Lord has had policies in place to ensure the rights and benefits of our LGBTQ colleagues and the LGBTQ community, including but not limited to LGBTQ rights as an integral part of our diversity, inclusion and implicit bias training. Additionally, we were one of the first firms, if not the first, to have a transgender partner go through the transition (while a partner), with covered health benefits for the transition. We provide partner benefits in the same manner as we do for everyone.

Because the firm's policies are in writing, they are automatically more likely to be adhered to, and because of ongoing education, colleagues in our firm are reminded of the policies and their importance to the success of our firm. In addition, leadership, beginning with the chair of the firm, reinforces the message of inclusion of the LGBTQ community and other underrepresented groups.

The importance of strong leadership and mentoring opportunities

Locke Lord's approach to D&I is unique for the involvement (going beyond 'efforts') by the firm's chair and leaders. D&I is one of the five articulated core values of the firm.

Additionally, the firm has a strategic plan for D&I and uses it to establish goals that advance diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). We focus not only on recruitment but also retention and advancement. One of our firm's many successes is the Diverse Mentoring Programme, which demonstrably aids in the retention of our diverse attorneys. More than two years ago, each member of the executive committee volunteered to serve as a mentor/sponsor to a diverse attorney, no matter the experience level of the attorney, recognising that everyone can benefit from great mentorship. The programme has since been expanded to department heads serving as mentors/sponsors.

Leaders at the HRC and members of the LGBTQ community had concerns about restroom usage of transgender individuals. Our firm took the lead on this issue and had very specific training on the importance of non-discriminatory restroom practices. This training was led by the general counsel of our firm to clearly demonstrate the importance of the issue.

Doing away with 'exclusive' labels

It is believed that firms and members of the legal profession in general should have an appreciation for the fact that the legal profession and to a degree, law firms, have been built on the premise that being 'exclusive' is better. This structure has long been baked into law firms, sometimes in excess of 100 years. It will take a great deal of effort if the firm is not intentional in dismantling those structures.

Firms that are intentional in their actions, are transparent (with policies published), think about succession, understand that DEI and excellence are not mutually exclusive, and are forward-thinking in all of the actions taken are primed for success far into the future. Understanding that being inclusive does not translate into excluding others is a major key to success.

It is easier than it looks

My advice to other law firms looking to create an effective D&I strategy is that being successful is not as difficult or complicated as it may appear. However, it does require intentionality and a willingness to step out of the firm's accustomed range of comfort.

D&I should be a stated and published core value. There must be a clearly articulated strategic plan for D&I, which guides the firm's actions to ensure that D&I permeates through all aspects of the firm, including but not limited to recruitment, retention and the use of metrics. Measurement tools must be in place to ensure the established goals (consistent with the strategic plan) are met. Constant and consistent messaging to all members of the firm on the importance of DEI should be provided by leadership, including the firm's chair or managing partner.

I would also advise firms to review their history – understand their data and opportunities provided to various demographics over time – and then implement policies to overcome any possible deficits relating to everyone not included. There should also be an understanding that 'equal' does not necessarily mean 'equitable'.

This article is part of an ongoing series on diversity and inclusion initiatives within leading law firms. For more in the series, please see:

- [How Armstrong Teasdale is making DEI part of its DNA](#)
- ["There is always more work to be done": Baker McKenzie's first-ever D&I chief on global diversity efforts](#)

- [“The bedrock of a good D&I strategy is listening to your team”: how Crowell & Moring is creating positive change in the workplace](#)
- [An inside look at Reed Smith’s diversity and inclusion strategy](#)
- [“What we believed was equal and fair a year ago may not be good enough now”: interview with White & Case global diversity chair](#)

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