



President's Column

DEI Matters – The Allied Bar's Equality Committee

BY BILL MATEJA

Why does diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) matter to all of us in the Dallas Bar? While the answer has always seemed somewhat self-evident to me, the truth is that I'd not previously spent the time to clearly articulate why. Coupled with the fact that DEI has become an unfortunate buzzword, leading to multiple misconceptions and clichés which cause some to stop trying to understand why it is important, I've set out below—with the help of our terrific Allied Bars Equality Committee—to articulate in simple terms why it is that DEI matters and to share with you some of the things the Dallas Bar is doing to promote DEI.

The Case for Diversity

Diverse lawyers bring unique perspectives and experiences to the table, which in turn allows legal teams comprised of diverse lawyers to better understand the needs of a diverse clientele. Diverse lawyers also bring unique strengths. Visualize a Marvel superhero team in which each hero has a unique power. By creating a diverse legal team, you'll have at your disposal lawyers with equally unique strengths.

People from the same backgrounds and experience tend to think and talk alike, leading to groupthink and limited creativity. Diverse teams, on the other hand, approach legal problems using different lenses and approaches. They look at legal problems from all angles—culture, history, and social. As a result, diverse teams are more likely to arrive at innovative solutions and advance more robust legal positions and arguments. As noted in the Equality Committee's DEI "Toolkit," which I discuss below, a study by Cloverpop in 2017 showed that inclusive teams make better business decisions up to 87 percent of the time and arrive at decisions twice as fast with half the number of meetings.

Let's face it, a legal system that lacks diversity also risks losing the trust of the public. We've seen this time-and-time again. When individuals see lawyers and judges who reflect their own backgrounds, they not only feel more at ease but also have greater confidence in the fairness of the system. Conversely, if the legal world is all one color, people tend to doubt whether the system truly is fair.

Equity Is Important

Envision a running race. Equity insures that everyone starts this race at the same time and that there are no shortcuts for some versus others—something I feel confident that all of us can agree upon. Equity is an imperative to ensure that everyone has equal access to the same opportunities in the legal profession. It also means that we must address systemic barriers that have prevented some from advancing, whether it be at law firms, in the judiciary or otherwise.

Equity extends to legal proceedings too. Those judging disputes, whether they are at the courthouse, in administrative proceedings or otherwise, must insure that all parties get a fair shake regardless of their background. That means accommodating disabilities, cultural differences, or language barriers because, as they say, "Justice is blind."

Inclusion: Everyone Is Invited To The Party

I believe it's fairly self-evident that inclusive law offices attract and retain top talent. If candidates see people who look like them succeeding, they're far more inclined to join that law office. Inclusive law offices also produce increased lawyer engagement and job satisfaction because lawyers feel valued for who they are. And when lawyers are engaged and satisfied, clients become the beneficiaries of better results.

And then again, "Why wouldn't we invite everyone to the party?"

More on Why DEI Matters

Better Legal Outcomes: Diverse teams win more cases and deals. They see things that others don't.

Show Me The Money: It's well documented that law firms which promote DEI attract a wider client base. McKinsey and Company's "Delivering Through Diversity" report, which is referenced in the Equality Committee's Toolkit, reports that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity were 21 percent more likely to outperform their peers on profitability and those in the top quartile for cultural/ethnic diversity on executive teams were 33 percent more likely to have industry-leading profitability.

Justice for All: The legal profession is about making things right because it exists to promote justice. DEI is also about making things right, helping fix what's broken, and keeping the scales balanced.

The Dallas Bar Gets It: The Allied Bars Equality Committee and Its Resources

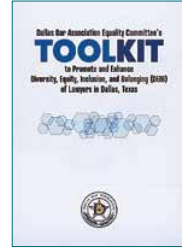
In the aftermath of George Floyd's death in May of 2020, the DBA and its Allied Bars recognized the need for a more direct approach to addressing DEI gaps within the legal profession. This realization led to the creation of the Allied Dallas Bars Equality Task Force, a "call to action," and ultimately the Allied Bars Equality Committee, which originally was chaired by **Koi Lomas** and **Paul Stafford** and later

chaired by **Katie Anderson**, **Cortney Parker** (current chair), and **Ashley Jones Wright** (current vice-chair). **It certainly is one of our most important committees.** For more on the Equality Committee, I commend Cortney Parker's excellent article about the Committee and its Diversity Award Checklist to you which is on page 20.

The Equality Committee's DEI "Toolkit"

While the Equality Committee's work product has been extensive, I urge those looking for a roadmap on how to incorporate or better incorporate DEI into their law offices to get a copy of the Equality Committee's recent **DEI Toolkit**. In addition to being a roadmap, the Toolkit addresses potential questions and obstacles law firms and departments face when hiring diverse personnel and provides strategies to mitigate challenges at every step. It emphasizes that the first step in addressing DEI gaps in the larger legal context is recognizing these gaps internally. With objective self-evaluation in mind, the Toolkit asks firms and legal departments to review their descriptive and substantive representation—assessing both the visibility and distribution of authority across their attorneys.

The Toolkit also offers step-by-step instructions and tips on how to prioritize DEI in an organization's mission, practice, and hiring processes. While highlighting the importance of mitigating unconscious bias and offering a comprehensive analysis of the interview and resume review processes, the Toolkit provides additional guidance on how to implement outreach programs, foster leadership commitment, and enforce belonging and equity in employment. To ensure the longevity of DEI efforts, the Toolkit outlines strategies for retaining diverse talent through fostering trust, flexibility, promotion, opportunity allocation, and transparent career trajectories. You can obtain a copy of the Toolkit by going to DallasBar.org and clicking on the Diversity tab. If you want a hard copy, email me at bmateja@sheppardmullin.com.



The Equality Committee's "Diversity Award Checklist"

To recognize those committed to supporting "the legal community as it aims high to achieve greater diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and belonging for our lawyers, clients, and community," the Equality Committee created a "Diversity Award Checklist." The Checklist encompasses categories such as "Education, Training & Communications," "External and Internal Diversity Commitments," and "Recruiting & Retention" that a law firm or legal department of any size can complete. You can read about it more on page 20.

The Equality Committee's "Privilege & Perspective" and Book Club

Once a year, the Equality Committee presents "Privilege & Perspective," an engaging event that allows you to participate in a privilege walk where prompts are given to take steps forward and back based on life experiences, a panel discussion, and separate breakout groups. This year, Carrington Coleman is sponsoring the event at its office with **Amber Sims** of AT&T leading a panel discussion on how we as legal professionals can improve our own initiatives to make our workplaces one in which people of all backgrounds can thrive. Mark your calendar for **September 12, 2024, 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.** (but come at 5:00 to mix and mingle) and watch for the link to register to attend.

The Committee's **Book Club** aims to provide opportunities to hear new perspectives and voices. It leverages influential novels, writings, discussions, and speakers to spark conversations about social and racial injustices in our society. Participants receive access to additional suggested readings and invitations to quarterly CLE discussions or presentations via Zoom. Watch DBA Online to see the dates and register to attend these virtual events, whether you have read the book or not!

Wrapping Up

So, please stop and consider what you are doing to promote Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion within your law office and within the greater legal community. Don't hesitate to lean on and check out what our incredibly active and able Equality Committee is doing to promote the same. And do what you can to spread the good word—Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is good for you...it's good for me...and its good for our profession.

WBMateja

HEADNOTES

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