



Champions of Diversity

Breaching the Norm: Inside the “Inclusion”

By Rodney W. Jacobs, Jr.

The legal profession has been under tremendous pressure to emulate a workforce that is representative of an ever-changing world. It was Albert Einstein who taught us, “You cannot solve a problem from the same consciousness that created it. You must learn to see the world anew.” Over the years, it seemed that the American legal profession tried to solve its diversity problems with the same thinking that created them. It clings to the past and the present, “to protect, preserve, and maintain.” It acted as if preserving the status quo would solve all, when in fact it will solve nothing. Fortunately, there is a new standard in the legal profession that fosters the triumphs of trail blazers of diversity, not just rainmakers of money. These trail blazers’ attempts have not only helped the legal field become more inclusive and diverse, but they have brought forth innovative ways of attracting the nation’s best and brightest diverse lawyers.

This article will highlight the insight of large law firm partner Paul Lancaster Adams. Mr. Adams is the managing shareholder of Ogletree Deakins’ Philadelphia office and a member of the firm-wide Management Committee, as well as the Diversity and Inclusion Steering Committee. With a strong in-house and outside counsel background, Mr. Adams brings a unique and practical perspective to his national clients. He has skillfully addressed a broad range of key employment issues critical to the modern workplace through counseling, negotiation, and litigation. Mr. Adams understands that the profession’s acceptance of diversity will pay large dividends for the future progression of the legal community. Paul Lancaster Adams’ advice and comments show an innovative direction toward championing diversity and inclusion in the legal profession from the large firm perspective.

DIVERSITY ADVANTAGE: How has the firm made efforts to recruit diverse candidates?

ADAMS: Humbly, Ogletree Deakins gets a number of accolades for its diversity. We are more diverse than other firms our size. Ogletree Deakins prides itself



Paul Lancaster Adams

on its ability to provide premier service to its clients by continuing to recruit, retain, develop, and promote top-talented attorneys regardless of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression. In terms of recruiting, Ogletree Deakins currently recruits at both local and national job fairs for diverse law students across the coun-

try. This includes, but is not limited to, the Cook County Job Fair in Chicago, Illinois; the Southeast Minority Job Fair in Marietta, Georgia; the Heartland Diversity Legal Job Fair in Kansas City, Missouri; and the Lavender Law Career Fair in New York. In addition to Ogletree Deakins’ commitment to recruiting diverse law students, the firm remains committed to the recruitment of diverse lateral attorneys as well.

DIVERSITY ADVANTAGE: What steps has the firm taken over the past five years to make the workplace more inclusive of diverse groups?

ADAMS: In 2011, the firm’s leadership made a goal to create a senior management position for someone who could focus on inclusion and professional development 100 percent of the time. This goal was accomplished in September 2011 when the firm hired a five-member, full-time Professional Development and Inclusion (PDI) team, led by Michelle Wimes, Esq., whose primary focus is to establish programs and initiatives that help sustain a productive and all-inclusive work environment in every office location. This type of commitment to employees and clients is rarely seen among Am Law 200 firms. The firm’s leadership also felt it necessary to combine the two functions of professional development and inclusion into one department. By approaching the firm’s professional development and inclusion initiatives in this way, the firm has successfully distinguished itself from its competitors, and has found an effective way to develop all levels of talent regardless of how they identify in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and disability.



■ Rodney W. Jacobs, Jr., has earned a J.D. from the University of Dayton School of Law, Dayton, Ohio, and is completing an M.P.A. with the university. He has interned with the U.S. Equal Opportunity Commission, the New York State Attorney’s General Office, the U.S. Air Force Judge Advocate General, and the Honorable Walter H. Rice of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Ohio.

DIVERSITY ADVANTAGE: What type of qualifications do partners look for in their diverse candidates, other than what you find on their resume?

ADAMS: As a labor and employment law firm, with over 700 lawyers in over 48 offices in the United States, as well as in Europe and Mexico, and representing clients from the Fortune 50 to small business, it's really important to be qualified. Distinctively, although we are a large firm, we have a boutique practice model. Such allows us to have offices literally in the marketplaces, geographically, where our clients have the need for legal services. Operating as a boutique model creates opportunities to work closely with each other, and the atmosphere is very family-like. Therefore, working well with others and being collaborative is paramount. For every candidate, we look at how they would relate to our firm, our firm culture of high quality service to clients, and the respect and treatment that we give each other. Often, we look for candidates that mirror what the plaintiff (*e.g.*, in a litigation context) and the business marketplace looks like, which would encourage the recruitment of diverse lawyers. Importantly, the same applies to our corporate clients. Corporations, however, are doing a better job of hiring diverse in-house lawyers in all substantive areas of the law, and it is important to have a mirroring of such efforts as it parallels with what society looks like. Altogether, having diverse perspectives make clients, and the attorneys who represent them, more effective and comprehensive in their legal representation.

DIVERSITY ADVANTAGE: It seems that the legal field has taken longer than other professions to diversify their working base. Do you think that trend is ending? And if so, why?

ADAMS: Lawyers are not at the same pace of change for diversity as many of our corporate business counterparts. Law firms are behind as a whole because we don't see as clearly how being diverse impacts the bottom line. In contrast, corporations often have an array of professions and concentrations in their organizations. And within that framework, many corporations commit resources to understand how each professional fits into the success of the organization. Corporations further understand that promoting and advanc-

ing diverse professionals can lead to more profitability. In other words, by having a diverse workforce, differences in perspectives are provided, which can lead to more thoughtfulness and creativity. Moreover, they understand the benefits of reliability on a broader scale. If an organization's customers are diverse, it needs to be able to relate to them and connect to them so that it can influence them in the marketplace. Having a diverse workforce allows for such influence. The legal community, unfortunately, has a lot of work still to do in this area, and unless more resources and attention, on a broader scale, are committed, diversity initiatives may suffer.

This is the second of a three-part series exploring the evolving face of the legal profession and what diverse candidates entering the legal field need to keep in mind as they navigate career choices. The first part, an interview with John Arrastia, a partner with Arrastia Capote partners, LLP, appeared in the November 2015 issue of *For The Defense*. In the interview, Mr. Arrastia offered advice and discussed his experience with diversity and inclusion from a small firm perspective. Part three, the last installment of this series, will discuss how we can implement and learn from the wisdom provided by these champions of diversity. **FD**