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PERSPECTIVE

Recruiting diverse attorneys begins with an inclusive environment

By G. Michelle Ferreira

Key to recruiting diverse attorneys is fostering an environment that supports and encourages diversity. Potential hires want to see a firm is advancing equal opportunity in all aspects of operations and practice, and taking concrete action to build a diverse workplace.

Firms cannot just say they are diverse and inclusive: they must demonstrate their intention through action. These actions can include: expanding relationships with minority bar associations and other legal diversity organizations; offering attractive work life programs; designing succession plans that promote greater diversity and inclusion; working with diverse attorneys to design career advancement plans; introducing diverse attorneys to major clients, including to lead engagements; reviewing work assignments and hours billed to ensure diverse attorneys are not being excluded; building strong professional skills development and mentoring programs for all attorneys; formalizing a diversity plan with concrete steps and accountability to management; and providing firmwide diversity training for all attorneys and staff.

Before joining Greenberg Traurig, LLP in 2004, I was a senior trial attorney with the Office of Chief Counsel at the IRS. The government was diverse, equally led by both sexes and people of color. When I chose Green-

berg Traurig, I did so partially because the firm was committed to diversity and inclusion. I saw an opportunity for me to grow into a shareholder and, hopefully, a leader. I am female and a Latina and I wanted a firm that was led by others who were similar. Since joining the firm, I

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have been promoted to principal shareholder, managing shareholder and I am a member of the firm's executive committee.

A firm's affinity groups can also play a role in helping attract and recruit diverse talent. At Greenberg Traurig, we support a multitude of affinity groups for our attorneys who are African American, Asian American, Hispanic American, LGBTQ+, and women; and we continue to gauge opportunities to expand those groups as our needs and demographics dictate. These groups assist not only with recruiting but also in the mentoring of junior attorneys. They also serve as a forum for group members to discuss and explore issues and opportunities that will add value to client relationships. Greenberg Traurig's Women's Initiative, an award-winning effort recognized by leading industry publications, can truly be said to have been influential in fostering the success of women attorneys, strengthening the firm's culture, contributing to the

firm's financial health, and better serving our clients.

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At Greenberg Traurig, we had a head start. Our founders

knew firsthand what it feels like to not be included, and it is the building block to who we are as a firm. The firm was founded in 1967 because our founders were not able to get legal positions in Miami because they were Jewish. Our senior leaders have had other experiences or relationships which make them particularly empathetic to historically disadvantaged groups. Having these kinds of experienced decision makers and leaders helps to make inclusion a priority. Similarly, our firm's diverse leaders persuasively advocate for individual obligations to diversity downstream with middle managers and others responsible for hiring, development, retention, and promotion. At Greenberg Traurig, it really is "diversity from the top down." Indeed, we believe our more junior, diverse lawyers see our diverse leadership as our commitment to diversity for our staff, lawyers, and vendors.

When diversity is a priority, it is critical for law firms to com-

municate that message to their entire operations and legal business units. From there, setting short-term goals becomes more achievable.

Looking ahead, the changing workforce demographics bode well for diversity and inclusion. In many instances, today's newer entrants into the workforce view themselves as global citizens who do not necessarily see color, gender, or other differences the same way other generational workers might have. They're demanding—as we all should—that leaders step up to the plate and serve as sponsors, mentors, and champions of diverse employees.

Leadership takes action; and it should also be so with diversity and inclusion.

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