

Allyship Must Be an Actionable Activity for Modern Law Firms to Thrive



Simply put, allyship, like success, does not occur in a vacuum, and its objectives are not the purview of one or two individuals, but rather requires a team approach—from hiring and integration to cultivation and advancement to social justice and civic investment decisions.

By Curt Toll, Alex Scarola and Nikki Lewis Simon | [October 13, 2021](#) | [The Legal Intelligencer](#)

Broadening the table for meaningful inclusion means more than refraining from excluding anyone. It translates into using positioning and experience to expand opportunity for all by *growing* leadership through a commitment to better cultivate and deploy a wider arsenal of talent. These efforts often reap even greater revenues. Combined, this constitutes the premise and promise of effective allyship in the law firm setting.

Increasingly, law firms that demonstrate a commitment to recruiting, incorporating, and empowering and wide range of perspectives will best position themselves for the future. The traumatic events of 2020 may have helped concentrate minds on this reality; however, some of us have been actively engaged in these thoughtful endeavors well before.

Set All-Hands Expectations

Allyship does not occur in a vacuum and its objectives are not the purview of one or two individuals. It requires a team approach. An organization must thoughtfully focus on hiring and integration, sponsorship

and advancement, social justice activities and civic investment. Those who work from this playbook stand to set themselves apart from the competition and soar.

Implementing these principals can be challenging because it demands relentless honesty, introspection, and pursuit that easily can fall to the wayside when the default lens traditionally has centered on the fundamental practice of law and client service. Even with the best intentions, complacency can be comfortable, particularly in a pressure-filled, risk-adverse industry.

Question Practices, Adjust and Adapt

As we put more energy into expanding the Philadelphia office of Greenberg Traurig, we thought hard about which practices to amplify and which ones to introduce to this market. We also explored broader talent pools, newer networks and innovative approaches in building out our team. Today, the composition at every level among our lawyers and business staff is shifting to be more reflective of the region we serve. It is an evolution and outlook that corresponds with our firm. More than half of our U.S. employees are women and 64% of our attorneys and business staff are women or minorities as of Dec. 31, 2020. That did not happen by chance, or overnight; it came through years of strategic focus and design. It was our trajectory even before the Diversity Lab launched its Mansfield Rule Certification program, which measures whether law firms have affirmatively considered at least 30% women, lawyers of color, LGBTQ+ lawyers, and lawyers with disabilities for leadership and governance roles, equity partner promotions, formal client pitch opportunities and senior lateral positions.

Our Mansfield Rule Certification serves as internal and external affirmation of our efforts, as well as a talent and opportunity magnet. It is typical for our legal teams to reflect the diversity clients expect and for our diverse attorneys to be invited to client forums that provide specialized opportunities to connect with clients and prospective clients, as well as secure new work.

The journey has offered, and continues to offer, the chance to forge deeper partnerships and widen access to legal careers among underrepresented practitioners—from aspirants of varied ethnic backgrounds to women lawyers to first-generation college graduates to those who are LGBTQ+. These professionals are integral to our office and our firm, from lawyers who lead teams of colleagues, client pitches, and pro bono matters to business staff that are indispensable to our operations. Clearly, we did not sacrifice quality by bringing them aboard and incorporating their talents and insights into our business because in 2020 the firm reported its seventh consecutive year of record revenue.

Let Commitment Reverberate Internally *and* Externally

While these moves were well underway before any of us knew the names George Floyd, Breonna Taylor or [Walter Wallace Jr.](#), those tragic and emotionally charged instances laid a new backdrop and imperative for all civic leaders to reassess the implications and costs of “business as usual.” The public anguish and outrage spawned by these and many other painful instances of 2020 challenged us to see how we could further deepen our imprint on Greater Philadelphia as corporate citizens and legal leaders. It also led us to recast our concept of inclusion and its application beyond our walls. We further encouraged our team to bring their full selves and lived experiences to conversations about crafting comprehensive responses. We wanted to better understand the challenges of inequity unearthed by the unrest and upheaval seen in Philadelphia and elsewhere. Allyship is not just an internal matter; it is also a public expression to those we serve and represent, directly as professionals and indirectly as neighbors.

That is why we intensified intentional investment in the education of the next generation of legal professionals; in supporting grassroots entities struggling for economic and social parity in the midst, as

well as the aftermath, of the criminal justice system; and in engaging in activities that locally address basic points of dignity—from safe housing to nutritious meals. These social action efforts extend beyond writing philanthropic checks into greater hands-on involvement. It was just as important for our team to see us act upon our values as it was for our clients, who at times have joined us, in developing additional avenues to make an impact.

For us, these aren't just initiatives. These are tenets that allow for stronger connections across our team, resulting in a broader understanding of each other, our clients, and our community. People who once had been more reluctant to speak up found not only their voices in these activities, but also willing ears and the chance to question, educate, and contribute to the vision of this office and firm. Our firmwide “Courageous Conversations,” which tackle aspects of social justice, race, class, gender, and orientation through digestible and relatable dialogues among colleagues, external experts, and sometimes clients, spark insightful exchanges across peer groups. These conversations instill different perspectives from colleagues and their daily existence, contribute to meaningful team building and enhance our culture. There is power in being seen and heard—a vantage that for too long in our society had been reserved for just some. Our experience proves the value of further opening those portals.

Resisting the temptations of the status quo and stagnation means intentionally instituting and exercising these values daily—among everyone in our organization. Unless the drive comes from a place of priority and measurability, conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion will not turn into allyship.

Visionary law firms must work, day in and day out, to foster allyship—for the good of our business and more importantly, for the good of our people.

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