
Authenticity Drives Profit: Supporting Diversity in Law Firms

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We have seen a tremendous amount of progress surrounding diversity at law firms in recent years. With that progress comes lessons learned from the initiatives and programs implemented. What we have learned is that firms have laid the foundation with diversity committees, marketing initiatives surrounding diversity, and attendance at career fairs to attract and hire diverse talent, but now comes the real work—implementing and supporting a culture that retains the diversity in the law firm.

Authentic law firms do not require attorneys to check their true selves (their hometowns, race, sexual orientation, gender, religion, marital status, parental status (to name a few) at the door before sitting down at their desk, only for the lawyer to return to their true selves at the end of the day before heading home. Law is a lifestyle. Lawyers do not check their jobs at the door at 5:00 pm. It follows that attorneys cannot be expected to shelve themselves while they are practicing. That makes for a lonely career.

So, now the focus should turn to what happens every day at a firm. How do firms live authentically in the diverse brand they have strived to create, because a law firm cannot have diversity without authenticity. After all, is a team diverse if everyone is expected to hide their true selves when at the office?

Creating an authentic culture will help attorneys flourish in their careers, which will translate into a marked increase in the law firm's bottom line. Allowing attorneys to feel more confident in the work environment reduces angst and stress that comes with learning how to be an attorney. Attorneys who feel that they are part of a team are more likely to seek counsel from colleagues as part of their career development, rather than isolating themselves in their office for fear of retribution for asking questions. Successful attorneys know when they need help and when to ask for that help. It is up to the firm to foster an environment where that attorney feels at home in seeking counsel from a colleague. Attorney development is a key component in revenue generation as the more knowledgeable an attorney becomes, the more efficient that attorney becomes at a higher billing rate.

Further, an attorney that feels supported by their colleagues and the firm are more likely to share their aims and ambitions. This supports an attorney's growth and, concurrently, that attorney's business development. Increasing each attorney's business development will, again, lead to increased revenue for the law firms. Moreover, an attorney that feels comfortable and supported by their employer and is also seeing positive results in developing business is less likely to leave their employer. Logically, why would a flourishing attorney move firms.

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In contrast, law firm cultures that do not promote inclusivity and permit people to be their true selves experience a high turnover rate due to dissatisfaction by employees. Employee turnover is a huge expense, which means decreased profits for the law firm. Encouraging each lawyer to be themselves is in the best interest of the firm, the clients and the attorney.

The Philadelphia Diversity Law Group (PLDG) injects a dose of this authenticity to the participating firms for a summer. The Fellows in the PDLG program give participating firms a unique opportunity to cultivate an authentic, inclusive workplace. During the PLDG internships, Fellows will learn something about the law and the business of law. In turn, the PLDG member firms will likely learn something about themselves by allowing the law students be their true selves.

When a firm fosters this authentic culture with their attorneys, then the attorneys can in turn do the same for the clients. Firms will see success in their own lawyers, and then they will see the success in their clients. There is a certain intangible brilliance that a client feels when they are working with an authentic team of lawyers. When everyone can come to the table as themselves, the best work gets done.

The only way attorneys can truly help a client take it to the next level, is when the client feels safe to be themselves and be open about their aims and ambitions. And the only way a law firm can truly help an attorney take it to the next level, is when the attorney feels safe to be themselves and be open about their aims and ambitions. There is no diversity without authenticity.

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