



Ep. 10: A Leadership Perspective on Firm Diversity and Inclusion Efforts

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Diversity and inclusion have been trending topics in the legal world for many years. The recent focus on social justice has cast a spotlight on those efforts. In this episode, we'll discuss the steps McGlinchey leadership has taken to engender a more equitable environment within the firm and throughout the legal community.

Deirdre McGlinchey: Hello, I'm Deirdre McGlinchey, Member and McGlinchey Stafford's New Orleans office and chair of the firm's Diversity Committee. I'm joined today by Rudy Aguilar in our Baton Rouge office. Rudy has served as the firm's Managing Member for over 18 years. Rudy, welcome. I'll start the discussion today with a few questions first. Why are diversity and inclusion important at McGlinchey?

Rudy Aguilar: Well, thanks, Deirdre. And it's a pleasure talking to you, and it's wonderful to remember that our firm has been always changing and always growing and always outside the box, starting with your father that started the firm, seeking a better way to serve clients and to practice law starting back in 1973. And in the same vein and in the same spirit of looking for change and doing things that are right for the practice of law, diversity and inclusion are important to us because it is something that is necessary. It is something that I am truly proud of and truly involved with and is a mission for me because, you know, my name is Rodolfo Jesus Aguilar. I came from Latin America and for the firm to elevate me to managing partner 18 years ago, at a time when that might not have been the coolest thing to do, it was done. So it's very important to me and important to the firm.

And why is it important to the firm? It's important because of course we want to be socially just, and we want to mirror our client base. It also is something we should do in our own self-interest. Diverse people come up with better solutions, diverse people have different mindsets and thought processes and bring different talents to solve a problem. And we're in the business of solving problems for our clients. So it is so wonderful to have different aspects and points of view brought by different experiences

that can bring more thought power, more innovation to bear on any kind of problem. And that is not to be overlooked because it's very powerful.

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Deirdre McGlinchey: Rudy, I agree that all of us here at McGlinchey value diversity and inclusion and agree that it's a very, very important goal for all of us, but it's certainly not without its challenges. What are some of the struggles that law firms including McGlinchey have faced in this area?

Rudy Aguilar: It is a struggle to build a diverse lawyer team at a firm, and it's not any different for us. And part of that begins with the pipeline. Although now, I understand that the majority of law graduates are women, and so that is certainly a progress in the pipeline and allows us to hire women. Other diverse backgrounds are not as well represented in the law schools, and therefore the pipeline to hire out of the law schools is not sufficient to support all of the diverse hires that we want to make. That's getting better. And we're working on the pipeline with some of our projects, with the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity with helping with pipeline, with helping with scholars, 1L scholars and with helping with interns, to help grow that pipeline, and get people excited of diverse backgrounds to get into the law program.

Additionally, some areas of the country have more challenges in finding diverse candidates. And we're blessed that we have a footprint across many States and many cities and many areas. And because of that, we have more opportunity, more potential candidates of diverse backgrounds that we can find, seek, and hire and engage. And we've very proud of that. Another struggle of law firms is keeping those qualified candidates in the law firms, because you might imagine these people are highly motivated, very good lawyers, and bring to bear their different experiences on so on problems and solutions. And our clients see that and hire them away, or they find that there's other opportunities for them outside of law. And we welcome that and cherish that and support that. But some of that is a struggle for us and for all law firms. And we're working hard to make the law firm a place where all of our lawyers, in particular our diverse lawyers, want to stay.

Deirdre McGlinchey: Rudy, recognizing the challenges that all law firms, I think, face in promoting diversity and inclusion, can we talk a little bit about the concrete steps and actions that McGlinchey is taking to ensure inclusion, not just representation, of diverse backgrounds? And of course, what comes to my mind, you mentioned it already, is our LCLD participation. Isn't it true that we were one of the founding members of LCLD? And I think in relatively recent history, you were honored specially by them for your efforts and the firm's in our involvement with the LCLD program.

Rudy Aguilar:

Yeah. We were initial members of the LCLD since its formation in 2009. We are very active in the LCLD. We have participated to such an extent that our firm has been recognized and honored by the LCLD for participating and at all levels with our Fellows. Each year, we nominate a fellow from the very beginning of that program, to be part of the Fellows program where a cohort of mid-level partners get together from diverse backgrounds and act like a class. They learn from General Counsels of many different companies, and from Managing Partners of many different law firms, the skills required to succeed and to learn about leadership in a law firm. We hire from the 1L program; [firms] usually do not hire first-year law students because they just don't yet have enough training from the law schools. But we do, through the LCLD program, to give 1L diverse candidates an opportunity to see a law firm, opportunity to grow, an opportunity to be excited about joining a law firm, and helping with that pipeline.

We also have a LCLD Pathfinders, which is for the two, three, four, five-year diverse candidates, to really energize them and give them skills that they might not otherwise get just from a law firm. So we're very active with the LCLD.

Diverse people have different mindsets and thought processes and bring different talents to solve a problem. And we're in the business of solving problems for our clients.

We have added benefits based upon the recommendations of our Diversity Committee, who in turn received recommendations from our different diversity groups. And those are generous pregnancy and parental leave, infertility benefits, transgender and gender reassignment benefits, and coverage for domestic partners. Those are all benefits that have had a significant impact for our people and would not have been even thought of by our firm, unless we had been open-minded and asked "what do our people need?"

Our Diversity Committee has given our diverse lawyers an opportunity to band together and come up with ideas. And because of that, we have several affinity and development groups that meet to give their perspective to the firm on what is needed for us to have an open and loving and family environment at our firm. Those include our Women's Initiative Network; one of my personal favorites, the Hispanic Affinity Group, of course; our Asian American Affinity Group; our African American Affinity Group; our LGBTQ Employee Resource Group; and others within the firm. We're very proud of that. And those affinity groups have been empowered to let the firm know what we need to make their lives better at our firm, give them the benefits and resources that will help them succeed at our firm, and see that they are valued members of our firm.

Deirdre McGlinchey:

Rudy, one thing that I've noticed and certainly appreciated as chair of the Diversity Committee is the extent to which the Management Committee of the firm has really embraced every initiative that we, as a committee, have proposed in support of creating a more equitable workplace at McGlinchey.

Rudy Aguilar:

I must tell you that I'm very proud of that. When all these initiatives were brought to our Management Committee, there was no reluctance. There were questions. How does

this work? How does it impact us financially? The normal business kind of questions. We're very proud of that within the firm.

Those are all benefits that have had a significant impact for our people and would not have been even thought of by our firm, unless we had been open-minded and asked "what do our people need?"

Deirdre McGlinchey: Rudy, thank you for addressing the concrete steps and for supporting the Diversity Committee in the recommendations and suggestions that we've brought to the Management Committee and to the firm as a whole. We've seen a lot of change over the past 40 years of our firm's existence. And so could we close by having you address, not just where we started, but the firm's continuing commitment to the future, looking forward and being open to change and continuing to promote diversity inclusion. Could you address the firm's goal or aspirations for the future?

Rudy Aguilar: Of course, the firm has done a lot, but it's not enough. It's not nearly enough. And we are pushing on that flywheel, and it's starting to move. And as you know, when you get a flywheel spinning, then it takes off on its own and needs a lot less energy. And we think we're at the verge of having that flywheel move on its own. What is that going to do? We are training our diverse lawyers in leadership, so that they end up running this firm. Ultimately we are giving diverse lawyers opportunities with clients, so that they are in front of the clients and take responsibility for the clients. We are hiring diverse lawyers in all of our offices as best we can, in different areas like commercial litigation and business transactions, so that we are opening our doors so that our diverse lawyers become, so that having diverse lawyers is a routine and expected attribute of our firm.

For example, in 2018, 12 of our 20 hires were diverse at 60%, and 30% of those were female and 35% were racially diverse. So we are monitoring this and pushing it. And if you are intentional about it, and think about it, and open your doors and open your mind, and get in front of the streams of people, where you have the ability to have qualified candidates of diverse backgrounds, come across your recruiting platform, you're going to find them and you can hire them. And those are the things that, along with all the changes that I discussed before, all of those intentional acts are how we're going to change McGlinchey and change the look of McGlinchey overtime.

Deirdre McGlinchey: Rudy, thank you. I appreciate you spending the time with us today. I'm encouraged by the progress we've made so far and, and optimistic about our firm's ability and commitment to promoting diversity inclusion in the future. And you've been a big part of that and I know will continue to be.

Rudy Aguilar: Deirdre, muchas gracias.

Deirdre McGlinchey: That's it for today, everyone. Thanks so much for listening.

Thanks for tuning into this episode of "More with McGlinchey." If you have a question or would like to propose a topic, we'd love to hear from you at podcast@mcglinchey.com. For additional resources on this topic, please visit mcglinchey.com. On behalf of the law firm that brings you more, we hope you'll join us next time.



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