



Diversity Insider

The newsletter of the
Diversity and Inclusion Committee

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Leadership Note

A Personal Letter from a DRI Diversity and Inclusion Committee Member: Past, Present, and Future

By Ricardo A. Woods



Dear DRI Members:

Let me tell you a story. Let me take you back to my first DRI encounter. Let me take you back in time.

My personal journey to DRI membership began early on a Tuesday morning in a very small town in Alabama. After driving nearly two hours through nowhere in particular, I reached the courthouse in another circuit to attend the monthly mandatory “cattle call” docket for the very first time.

As I walked into the courtroom, I noticed that I stood out like a sore thumb. I was the only young lawyer, the only person of color and the only lawyer from “out of town.” I was also the only one that did not seem to know everyone else. I was clearly an outsider. I had been to other courtrooms in other circuits numerous times, but this was different. I stood at the back of the courtroom not really knowing the rules of engagement for this place and I read over my notes. As I stood there alone, another out of towners entered the courtroom. He too stuck out like a sore thumb. Once he saw me at the back of the room, he came right over. He extended his right hand and introduced himself as Kevin Clark.

Kevin explained to me that he was also defense lawyer. He confirmed that we were in fact in a foreign land ripe with local customs written in pencil and famous for home cooking out of town lawyers. In addition to introducing himself, he explained the lay of the land in this particular part of the state; he gave me a lot of encouragement about the practice and asked me several questions. One question stood out the most. “What are you doing during the second week of June?” He quickly followed his question with an invitation to attend a DRI seminar for diverse defense lawyers in Chicago during the summer. Now, I was only in the second year of my law practice at my old firm and there were only five lawyers of color practicing with defense firms in the entire city of 200,000 people. (The number still shocks me). In fact, I think part of what peaked my interest in the seminar was the curiosity of what it feel like to see more than five diverse defense lawyers in one room at a time.

Kevin went on to explain that DRI was planning a Diversity Seminar and Corporate Expo where outside lawyers at defense firms would have the opportunity to talk directly to in-house lawyers about working together. I went back to my firm and with the help of an in-house mentor/client; I convinced the managing partner (a DRI member) that I needed to attend the first DRI Diversity Seminar in Chicago.

The Diversity Seminar/Corporate Expo opened my eyes to a completely new world and it came as such a necessary breath of fresh air. I met so many other diverse defense lawyers from all over the country who had professional experiences and life experiences like my own. The room was filled with diverse lawyers from every part of the country and I was not an outsider in this room. The speakers at the seminar were brutally honest about the problems and the solutions necessary eradicate a lack of diversity in our profession. The content was outstanding and the presentations were thought provoking. Topics like double standards, operating as an outsider, tokenism, assimilation and real metrics for inclusion dominated the conversation in an open and honest way with a room full of people invested in the outcome. So many of us heard our own stories and experiences echoed by much more successful and established lawyers. My definition of diversity and inclusion expanded and my network of trusted friends and allies began to grow. I was sold. I joined the Diversity and Inclusion Committee and I have not missed a Diversity Seminar/Corporate Expo since that first one.

I would later go on to find out that the Diversity and Inclusion Committee started as a task force. What started with a task force focused on growing diversity within the general membership grew over the years and the Diversity and Inclusion Committee continued to expand within the DRI ranks. The leadership of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee focused on recruiting new talent, publishing articles on diversity inclusion, implementing new programs, creating lasting content with a Diversity and Inclusion Manual, and developing a practical Diversity Tool Kit to guide our members to success. Formal collaboration with other substantive law committees (SLCs) developed with the assignment of diversity liaisons. More substantive law

committees came on board and continued to incorporate diverse speakers, and highlight topics on diversity and inclusion during all DRI seminars.

As we move forward the Law Institute members, program chairs, and the diversity liaisons are working to ensure that we are intentional about promoting diversity and inclusion. The Diversity and Inclusion Committee continues to work diligently to identify, cultivate and elevate emerging leaders in DRI and it has done so with a decent record of accomplishment resulting in multiple appointments at the board level. Perhaps the best and the worst thing about the Diversity and Inclusion Committee is that the committee continues to export talented leaders to other committees and our corporate partners.

With the level of purposeful exposure to our in-house counterparts DRI's Diversity and Inclusion Committee leaders are often tapped by other SLCs or offered the opportunity to move to in-house positions. During the seminar and throughout the year outside lawyers in law firms consistently meet new clients, and in-house lawyer meet their future outside counsel. Not surprisingly, every now and then a Corporate Expo attendee arrives at the seminar as outside counsel only to depart as a soon to be in-house lawyer as a byproduct of the interview.

Over the years, the interviews during the Corporate Expo have served as a multi-level opportunity for attendees. Numerous committee members have refined the art of making a great pitch, as well as revising and tailoring a pitch for new business. Our attendees learn about the do's, don'ts and disasters clients talk about to one another on a regular basis. Additionally, a great deal of young lawyers benefit from networking with more experienced lawyers who help them to navigate their careers. That mentoring experience continues to help us build the DRI ranks. For this reason, the Diversity and Inclusion Committee continues to look for future DRI members as early as law school.

These law student efforts are fully supported by DRI's leadership in the form of annually awarding two \$10,000 diversity scholarships to two diverse law students during the Diversity and Inclusion Seminar each year. To further support the law student pipeline efforts, the Diversity and Inclusion Committee moved forward by adding a formal pipeline presentation as part of the seminar. During the seminar members of the committee volunteer to provide law students with an open and candid panel discussion about the issues diverse lawyers face on a daily basis. The panel also focuses on the practical steps to success one needs to take early on in her or his careers. The law stu-

dents are also encouraged to join DRI, attend the seminar and enhance their network building skills in the process.

Future success for the Diversity and Inclusion Committee means not only being a part of the larger diversity and inclusion conversation, but also leading the action that follows the conversation. It means the artificial barriers that often exclude underrepresented groups from meaningful participation need to be identified and eradicated because of the detrimental role such obstacles play in impeding success for our clients. Shared success is the goal.

Our Committee Chair Rosary Hernandez has set high standards and established opportunities to interface with other SLC's and affinity bars on a regular basis. She and our Program Chair Stacy Douglas led the charge to move the Diversity and Inclusion Seminar to New Orleans last month, which marked the first time the seminar planning committee has ventured outside of Chicago. This means we are evolving and expanding into a new market. It means we are making and active effort reach new audiences and develop new members in different parts of the country with the intent to move beyond our borders.

As we move forward, we will share what we have learned over the years with other DRI members through our webcast, integrated programming and online platforms. We will continue to follow the path forged by those who started their DRI career by placing diversity and inclusion at the top of the list of priorities and those who continue to lead the organization at the highest level. This committee and its members will support the efforts of Young Lawyers, Women in the Law, and every SLC that supports diversity and inclusion in a meaningful way. We will continue to work towards shared success so that our work as a committee benefits DRI, its individual members and diversity and inclusion throughout our profession.

Sincerely,

Ricardo

Ricardo A. Woods is a trial lawyer and shareholder in Burr Forman, LLP's Mobile office. His practice is focus on defending product liability, toxic tort, and government liability claims. Ricardo has first-chair jury trial experience, as well as extensive pre-trial litigation experience. His product liability experience includes industrial grade machinery, warranty claims, automobile components, toxic torts, and chemical agents. Ricardo also serves as the vice chair of the DRI Diversity and Inclusion Committee and a member of Burr Forman's executive committee.

Feature Articles

Putting an End to “Diversity Props”

A Call to Action for a More Inclusive Profession

By Camille R. Bryant



The phrase “diversity prop” is gaining more and more notoriety. The term first sparked outrage at the confirmation hearing of Supreme Court Justice Brent Kavanaugh when a congressman introduced Lynne Patton, a Black woman and Department of Housing and Urban Development official, as proof that President Donald Trump is not racist. Shortly after the contentious hearing, Sharika Robinson, a black female associate, filed a lawsuit alleging that her North Carolina law firm is a “good ol’ boys club” that uses minorities as “diversity props” to impress clients.¹ Robinson alleges that Black lawyers are staffed on matters when clients demand diversity but are then assigned “busywork with no meaningful impact.”² The lawsuit asserts causes of action for race discrimination and retaliation in violation of 42 U.S.C. §1981; statutory fraud in violation of the North Carolina Unfair and Deceptive Trade Practices Act – N.C. Gen. Stat. §75-1; and fraud, breach of contract, tortious interference with employment and related opportunities under North Carolina common law.³ The law firm denies Robinson’s claims and specifically denies that it discriminated against her in any way.

The idea of diverse attorneys being used as “props” is not novel. After the Robinson lawsuit went viral, I spoke with several young attorneys who expressed similar concerns. For example, a young female attorney advised that her picture and biography were used as part of a request for proposal, despite her having no expertise in the applicable practice area. Similarly, an ethnically diverse male associate advised that he was touted as a “diversity hire.” These stories are troubling. However, the good news is that diversity and inclusion in the legal profession is now a topic being discussed regularly. Whether it is the focus on diversity—or lack thereof—of recent partner classes or the Open Letter call to action to increase diversity within client teams, attorneys are striving to take action to advance the profession.

¹ See *Robinson v. Robinson Bradshaw & Hinson, P.A.*, et al., Case No. 3:19-cv-00109 (N.D. Car. March 2019).

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

Part of the obstacle to tackling diversity and inclusion lies in a lack of consensus on what exactly the problem is. What accounts for gender, racial, and ethnic inequalities in law firms? Who is responsible for addressing inequalities? How do we leverage diversity to the betterment of our organizations and clients? No one person can possibly answer these tough questions alone, but this article will identify three actionable steps law firms can take towards creating a more inclusive culture and mitigating the risk of attorney’s becoming “diversity props.”

Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is

Most law firms have published a statement committing to diversity and inclusion. In the *Robinson* case, the plaintiff alleges that her law firm’s failure to fulfill its diversity and inclusion commitment statement amounts to fraud. It is debatable whether Robinson has any viable cause of action. Still, Robinson’s lawsuit poses the question, is your organization investing in diversity and inclusion, or is its commitment statement just a place holder? In no way should law firms do away with diversity and inclusion statements—that would be a failure for us all. But, organizations should invest adequate resources to any diversity and inclusion initiative.

One way for an organization to give its commitment statement meaning is by setting a clear, inclusive vision. Start by identifying your organizational culture, purpose, and vision. Then consider conducting anonymous surveys that include open conversations where employees can share their thoughts, ideas, and opinions. This will allow management to truly assess its commitment to diversity and make changes, if necessary.

Firm leadership also should regularly look for opportunities to plug minority and women attorneys into key committees and other leadership roles. Integrating women and diverse attorneys into leadership roles encourages different perspectives. Law firms should also be conscious of diversity and inclusion staffing efforts. It does not need to be the primary factor in hiring decisions, but law firms should be conscious of staffing when it comes to bringing on new team members. Part of this process may necessi-

tate that law firms include a diverse attorney as part of the hiring process.

Recognize that Recruitment Without Retention Is Futile

Many law firms place a major emphasis on recruiting bright, hard-working talent. Recruiting is the easy part. But, at the end of the day, hiring diverse talent only goes so far. Retention should be every law firm's goal. Law firms accomplish their retention goals by making their environments inclusive enough that the talent wants to stay. Instead of simply hiring minorities for the sake of improving diversity numbers, consider changing how employees treat each other as they go about their daily business. These day-to-day behaviors will add up to an overarching culture that embraces everyone's differences.

One way to accomplish this goal is by creating affinity groups to provide networking and support for women and minorities. In addition to providing community, advice, and support, affinity groups can be used to frame requests to management. And the requests go both ways –management will have an avenue to seek feedback on new policies and services. For those interested in starting any kind of affinity group, it's critical to align group goals with organizational strategy and frame requests in terms that show the benefits for the overall organization.

Another way to increase retention is through a sponsorship program. Forced mentorship programs are usually unsuccessful. While sponsorship involves developing a personal mentoring relationship, giving advice and coaching, it is really more about influence. Influential sponsors can identify opportunities for their junior protégés and make sure they are positioned in a way that will bring attention to their talents and achievements. A productive sponsorship program should consist of monthly touch points and balancing social connections with substantive legal work.

Leverage Diversity the Right Way

According to Ted Colbert, Boeing's Chief Information Officer, "The best workforce is a diverse workforce." Countless studies support this statement, directly linking organizational diversity and inclusion to higher revenue. That is why it comes as no surprise that more and more law firm clients are demanding diverse legal teams. While profit is

obviously a driving force for companies to integrate effort into their core strategies, the more important question here is *why* this connection exists. Therein lies the true source of competitive advantage for law firms.

The demand for diverse legal teams comes as a direct result of the changing population. Recent census data shows that millennials, who are defined as adults born between 1981 and 1996, are a more diverse group than in prior generations. In fact, almost 40 percent of millennials are minorities. As the population of millennials has multiplied, so has their presence in jury pools and on juries. Trial attorneys are the face of corporations. Juries closely watch the presentation of a case through counsel, and jurors may be more drawn to attorneys perceived as being more like themselves who present themes they can relate to. Law firms who choose to staff trials with non-diverse attorneys run the risk of perpetuating outdated image of heartless, profit driven machines that corporations fear when facing juries. Instead, law firms should leverage their diverse attorneys to put forward the best trial team possible. So, law firms should prioritize diversity and inclusion, not just because it is the right thing to do and will drive productivity and innovation, but because it will help law firms stay in business and be competitive.

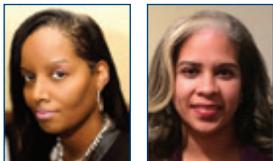
Increasing diversity within law firms does not happen overnight. Similarly, developing programs that will train and provide experience to women and minority attorneys that will enable them to serve as trial counsel takes time, effort and resources on the part of law firms. Still, there has never been a more opportune time for law firms to develop strong alliances with diverse attorneys. By utilizing the excitement, willingness, and capability of people with diverse backgrounds, leaders will find they are able to make a significant impact in their organizations.

Camille Bryant is a senior associate with McGlinchey Stafford, PLLC in New Orleans, Louisiana where she practices primarily labor and employment and products liability. Camille currently serves as the Louisiana State Membership Chair. She is also a member of the employment and diversity and inclusion sections of DRI. Camille can be reached at cbryant@mcglinchey.com

“The Torch”

Diversity in History, Achievements, and Strides in Legal Community

By Angela Y. DeMary and LaTonya Bland-Tull



When I Googled the term “torch-bearer,” it is defined as a person who leads or inspires others in working toward a valued goal; a person who carries a ceremonial

torch. It became immediately clear to me that each and every woman attorney and attorney of color is a “torch-bearer” in his or her own way. It also became abundantly clear to me that the “torch” represents the diversity in our histories, achievements, and strides in the legal community.

As we come off the heels of both Black History Month and Women’s History Month, I began to think about the importance of both and what they mean in my life. I then narrowed my thoughts on my path of becoming an African American, woman attorney and how both have been an impact. The statistics are there, and we are reminded regularly. There is significant disparity between the number of African Americans in the overall population versus the number of African Americans reflected in the legal profession. We are reminded when we enter an office where there may be none or few African American attorneys present. Moreover, we are reminded when we enter a courtroom or boardroom and observe that we are the only one or one of few African American attorneys present. That observation initially brings about thoughts of sadness of the reality that this is only how far we have come. However, followed by that initial feeling is a surge of pride in the accomplishment of where we are and anticipation for what the future holds. Simply put, it dawned on me that we are all a part of what will one day be considered history. We are history in the making. We are torchbearers carrying a torch.

When thinking of our own individual stories of being attorneys of color or women attorneys, one cannot help but to reflect on those who came before us and their experiences in reaching that goal. At the present time, I cannot tell you how 9-year-old Angela determined that the future would include being an attorney. It’s not clear whether it was a grandmother who recognized the natural propensity to debate and argue a cause or whether it was brief exposure to something or someone. In any event, that was what it was and would always be my destiny.

As time passed and my knowledge of predecessors grew, Thurgood Marshall became one of my inspirations

and motivations. In my adolescent mind, Thurgood Marshall represented an African American defying the odds to become a United States of America Supreme Court Justice. In my mind, those odds included being an African American born in the early 1900’s at a time when just being an African American was overwhelmingly hard. The cards were stacked against him. The laws did not favor him. The culture did not appreciate or acknowledge him. However, despite all of those adversities, he went on to be a part of the Nation’s most powerful, elite, and prestigious Court: a Justice on the Supreme Court of the United States of America. That brought a sense of pride to this young, bright-eyed, aspiring attorney. Justice Marshall carried the torch.

My very good friend and “sister” attorney of color, LaTonya Bland-Tull, has a similar story. Her thoughts of becoming a future lawyer began at the early age of about seven. She explains, “I’m uncertain but I believe it was because of the respect and admiration with which people seemed to attribute to the profession that made me want to become an attorney even without fully understanding what it was.” When asked whether predecessor women in the legal field impact her, she responded with a resounding “Absolutely!” Attorney Bland-Tull went on to share that she was and remains inspired by Charlotte E. Ray. According to Attorney Bland-Tull, “Charlotte E. Ray was the first African-American female lawyer in the United States. She attended my alma mater Howard University. She also became the first woman granted permission to argue in front of the U.S. Supreme Court. This occurred in the late 1800s! When I think of the challenges and difficulties she must have endured and overcome during that period, it is empowering to me. It also provides me with a sense of obligation to continue my work in this profession and especially in my specific area of practice—civil rights.” Like the empowerment and motivation brought on by thoughts of what Justice Marshall overcame, Charlotte E. Ray provides that empowerment and motivation to Attorney Bland-Tull. She explains, “When I am treated disrespectfully by other attorneys or judges, I often reflect on what predecessors likely endured and the fact that they would not allow such treatment to impede their work.” Charlotte E. Ray carried the torch.

Accepting and Maintaining the Torch: The Present

What an amazing feeling it is to toss that cap into the air at the end of the law school graduation ceremony. What an even more amazing feeling it is to receive word that you passed the bar exam. Thereafter, there is an overwhelming feeling of accomplishment when you hear the words “you’re hired” for your first position as an attorney. At that point, whether you realize it or not, you have now become an official torchbearer. You now hold the torch as a woman in a male-dominated field. As a person of color, you become a torchbearer in a non-person of color dominated field.

Truthfully, I am brought back to the thoughts of how it must have been to be Thurgood Marshall. If you recall, the adolescent Angela imagined that it must have been overwhelmingly hard for him. The cards were stacked against him. The laws did not favor him. The culture did not appreciate or acknowledge him. However, despite all of those adversities, he went on to be a part of a very small and elite segment of the legal community: a Justice on the highest court of the Land, the Supreme Court of the United States of America. I realize that my experiences have been similar *in a different way*.

Being an African American woman attorney, Attorney Bland-Tull says that awareness of her predecessors brings a sense of responsibility. Specifically, she shares that “reflecting upon what they must have endured and overcome to accomplish all that they have is empowering. It also creates an obligation for me not to be deterred by the challenges I have and will face.” When asked whether she realizes that she is a present-day torchbearer, she goes on to share, “I have in the sense that I mentor some young attorneys and even some students who have expressed an interest in the legal profession. I aspire to be an inspiration and source of empowerment for them.” She is both “proud and concerned that [she] bear the torch well.” Like Thurgood Marshall and Charlotte E. Ray, we carry the torch.

Passing the Torch: The Future

Outside of the office and courtroom, I enjoy interacting with the youth and participating in career days. Most times, the demographic is largely “minority.” It provides an opportunity to expose children to an African American woman attorney (which most times they never have been)

and to share my experiences and knowledge. For the most part, the youngsters are very inquisitive and thought-filled about the legal field. Most times, there is at least one who responds, “Be a lawyer” to the commonly asked question of “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Through those experiences, it is clear that there remains a generation of future attorneys of color in the making. In every one of those future attorneys of color, there is pride in the thought that diversity will be continued and maintained in the practice. The torch will continue.

Attorney Bland-Tull agrees that the torch must be maintained. For her, it is an ethical responsibility. The attorney reasoned that she maintains the torch “by striving to be an ethical, principled, attorney of integrity who uses her platform to assist the underprivileged and to help the next generation of attorneys.” With the same immediate and enthusiastic way that she responded when asked whether women in the legal field impacted her, Attorney Bland-Tull responded “Absolutely!” when asked if it is important to maintain the torch. She went on to explain, “Without the torch, the next generation may be uninspired, unmotivated and unprepared to continue the important work begun by the previous torchbearers.”

Black History Month and Women’s History Month provide us with a regular and annual point at which to reflect on the past, the present, and the future. 146 years have passed since Charlotte R. Ray became the first African American woman lawyer in the United States. However, there remains great strides to be made in diversifying the practice of law. The statistics and the daily realities of an attorney of color continue to reflect huge disparities. However, I do remind myself that we are here. We are present. We are maintaining and carrying the torch passed to us. There is a sense of pride in knowing that that torch continues to be passed to young, future, aspiring attorneys. Just as our predecessors and present-day practitioners, one day they too will carry the torch.

Angela Y. DeMary is a shareholder in the Mt. Laurel, NJ office of Marshall, Dennehey, Warner, Coleman and Goggin. Attorney DeMary specializes in workers’ compensation law.

LaTonya Bland-Tull is a partner at the office of Hagerty and Bland-Tull Law, LLC in Collingswood, NJ. Attorney Bland-Tull specializes in employment/labor law and is also an adjunct law professor.

Three Factors Toward One Successful Retention

By Tiana M. Towns



My friends have a wager: of the eight of us attorneys of color who all began our careers at Dorsey & Whitney LLP together, they're betting that I will be the one to make partner. But this wasn't always the wager. Three years ago, our wager was on who would still be working at Dorsey in the next six months. They had their money on me being the first out the door.

While my career trajectory at Dorsey has changed dramatically, it was not without a strategic plan and coordinated support of a few leaders and friends within the organization. As I reflect on what has allowed mine to be a story of success rather than another story of a woman of color who has left big law behind, I found three factors that have been the difference between my experiences and those of my seven former Dorsey colleagues.

Strategic Practice Assessment and Planning

My strategic plan began with a self-assessment. I needed to quickly decide whether my legal practice was a good fit. The answer to that was a clear and resounding "No." I was miserable doing trademark and brand management work. My work was form-based and routine. I was not being assigned challenging or interesting assignments because, as one partner vaguely noted in my performance review, I allegedly had "no knowledge of business." For that reason, I was not encouraged to share my thoughts, and I was not invited to get to know my colleagues.

At the same time, the chief development officer in Dorsey's HR department had caught wind of my ongoing struggle to find my stride at Dorsey. Specifically, she had seen my performance evaluations and could not believe what she read. But instead of encouraging me to seek opportunities elsewhere, she and I engaged in a series of meetings to help me determine whether my legal practice would be a good fit, what personality types I would work best with, and what my communication style is. We quickly learned that I was a "square peg" forcing myself to work in the "circle hole" of the trademark practice group. That is, I had a valuable and unique skillset that was not being maximized in the practice group I had chosen after rotating through the group after three weeks as a summer associate.

My time at Dorsey could have ended at this point. However, I was lucky to have found one person in leadership to take a chance on me and realize that diversity retention takes time and effort.

Coordinated Support from Firm Leaders

Once my HR advocate and I determined that I was better suited as a litigation associate, she also helped me develop a plan to create an environment for me to succeed.

This environment consisted of leaders, mentors, and sponsors who would challenge me while also assisting me to move my career forward within the organization. I was paired with two mentors: a white male veteran trial partner with nearly 40 years of experience and an extensive knowledge of business, and super savvy senior associate known for her unmatched work ethic. These individuals were tasked with helping me keep my plate full and with providing me with clear and frank feedback.

In addition to these mentors, I also had to meet the goals and expectations of the Trial Practice Group head. Her expectations were simple: produce clean work, meet my hours requirement, and be curious and learn as much as possible. But she also assured me that she would challenge me and make my success her personal responsibility.

Since my transition into the Trial Group three years ago, I have maintained strong relationships with these three individuals and have picked up a few additional mentors along the way. These three continue to be my primary sources of work, my sounding boards, and my most trusted critics and advisors. My decision to stay at Dorsey is the fruit of their coordinated and intentional efforts to uplift me and to put me in a position to succeed.

Being "Gritty"

My retention story began with a conscious decision to stay at Dorsey despite having every reason to leave and start fresh elsewhere. As I reflect on my brief time in the legal profession, I realize that the one factor that played a substantial role in my success was not a lesson that anyone taught me or a characteristic that I realized I was relying on at the time. This factor was "grit."

The concept of "grit," popularized by University of Pennsylvania professor Angela Duckworth, is characterized

by passion and perseverance applied toward a long-term goal. Professor Duckworth defines “grit” as simply “sticking with your future day in and day out and working really hard to make that future a reality.” To succeed toward any goal, according to Professor Duckworth, an individual needs to have the ability to withstand failure and any major setback without being discouraged or derailed.

There were moments in my first year as a lawyer where I seriously questioned my decision to go to law school, to go into big law, and to go to Dorsey. The success that I had experienced in undergrad and in law school just wasn't translating into any form of success in my practice. During these moments, I fell victim to unproductive self-talk and

believing that these difficult moments would define my career. And, though I was likely days away from being fired, I still refused to seriously consider any other career before giving one more good-faith try toward becoming not just a good, but a great, lawyer. I believe that I am where I am today because of my ability to withstand challenging seasons and why my friends and I can bet on my success.

Tiana M. Towns is an associate in the Trial Group at Dorsey & Whitney LLP, where she represents clients in the areas of construction and real estate, intellectual property, and commercial litigation.

DRI News

2019 DRI Diversity for Success Seminar and Corporate Expo

This year the DRI Diversity and Inclusion Committee hosted its 14th annual Diversity for Success Seminar and Corporate Expo in New Orleans, June 19–21. This seminar included an honest and frank conversation about the ongoing diversity struggle in the legal profession. Strategies for overcoming the roadblocks that diverse law firm attorneys face were discussed, while support from our corporate friends in implementing our strategies was sought. Attendees learned what corporate clients are looking for when lawyers make a pitch for business and then utilized those skills in during the expo, where corporations committed to diversifying their outside counsel interviewed select diverse and underrepresented attorneys, and their law firms. **Stacy Douglas** of Collinson Daehnke Inlow & Greco in Torrance, California, served as program chair, with **Gary Howard** of Bradley Arant Boult Cummings LLP in Birmingham, Alabama, serving as program vice chair. **Geri Lynn Arrindell of Mickes O'Toole LLC in Saint Louis and Atoyia Scott Harris of Proskauer in New Orleans served as expo chair and vice chair, respectively.**

Joe Cohen Receives 2019 Willert Pioneer Award

As always, the Thursday Diversity Luncheon featured a keynote address, this year from **The Honorable Bernette J. Johnson**, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Louisiana, New Orleans, along with the presentation of the **Sheryl J. Willert Pioneer Diversity Award**.

The Sheryl J. Willert Pioneer Diversity Award is presented to persons who have pursued

- a commitment to inclusion of persons within the institution who are members of traditionally under-represented groups;
- dedication and commitment to advocating diversity in the legal profession through activity that has a visible, tangible, or measurable impact on the perception of, attitude toward, respect for, and treatment of other persons;
- the development of contemporary measures to fight discrimination and prejudice in the profession; and
- diversity initiatives and active promotions of relations among persons of different races, ages, ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientations, religious backgrounds, or physical and mental abilities.

The 2019 recipient of the Sheryl J. Willert Pioneer Diversity Award was **Joseph D. Cohen** of Porter Hedges in Houston. Joe is a partner in the Houston office of Porter Hedges. His practice focuses on handling catastrophic injury and wrongful death cases arising from allegations of products liability, including pharmaceuticals. He also provides individual representation to current and former employees of pharmaceutical and medical device manufacturers in both civil and criminal contexts. Joe has been an active member of DRI for 21 years, serving in leadership positions on several committees. He is a member of the DRI Board of Directors and serves as its liaison to the DRI Diversity and Inclusion Committee.

“Joe has been an amazing D&I liaison,” said Rosary Hernandez, Chair of the DRI Diversity and Inclusion

Committee. “He is passionate and committed to advancing diversity and inclusion throughout DRI. He is energetic and creative and always challenging us to develop new strategies and enhance the conversation to move our group forward. We are so grateful for all the time and energy he devoted to us. We love Joe!”

Two Annual DRI Diversity Scholarships Awarded

The DRI Diversity Scholarship selection committee once again found two very fine and deserving winners: **Anna Fugate** and **Stacy Porche**, who were recognized during the seminar.

Anna Fugate is a second-year law student at Lewis & Clark Law School in Portland, Oregon, where she is ranked second out of 202 students in her class. She is currently doing research for a law professor on class action lawsuits and multidistrict litigation. She has secured post-graduation clerkships in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit. She has had to overcome daunting personal hardship to have accomplished so much. As a junior in high school, she was homeless for a year before finding a job and an apartment. She supported herself through the remainder of high school, community college, and Northern Arizona University.

Stacy Porche attends Southern University Law Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where she is ranked fifth in her class. She obtained a Bachelor of Science degree from Arizona State University. She has achieved high academic success despite working full time with the Louisiana Department of Justice, Gaming Division, where she works to promote free services available to those with gambling problems. In addition to her daytime job and evening studies, she also works as a teaching assistant for first-year law students. She will be a summer associate at Taylor Porter Brooks & Phillips LLC, one of Louisiana’s oldest and largest civil law firms defending businesses. As the first-ever law student in her family, she is aware that black attorneys make up only five percent of all attorneys and hopes that she will be an example to young girls and minorities.

Reflections from First-Time Attendees

Eddie Holiday, Bowman and Brooke LLP, Miami, Florida

I absolutely loved the DRI Diversity for Success Seminar! It was great to see so many diverse attorneys in the same room discussing issues that impact attorneys of color,

women, and the LGBTQ+ community. It was especially refreshing to hear from the panelist in the “In 2019 Are We “Faking Diversity?” and “Woman, Person of Color, or Both?”; they were *real* and did not pull any punches and provided insight as to how to: (1) improve diversity in the legal profession and (2) overcoming roadblocks faced by diverse law firm attorneys.

As an Associate I found the networking opportunities invaluable. I also ran into some old friends and met some new ones. It was also a blast to learn how to give a successful pitch in the “Pitch Perfect” panel discussion and then use those skills the following day at the Corporate Expo. I was so pleased with the seminar that I want to take a more impactful role in DRI and decided to volunteer for next year’s seminar.

Overall, I give the conference a 10/10 and look forward with working with the DRI Diversity and Inclusion Committee in the future.



Eddie Holiday’s practice includes various aspects of complex civil litigation in state and federal courts. Recognized as a “Rising Star 40 Under 40” in the Daily Business Review, his practice consists of representing Global 500 clients with a focus on the defense of product liability, premise liability, negligent security and toxic tort claims. Prior to joining the firm, Eddie served as an Assistant State Attorney for the Miami-Dade Office of the State Attorney, the fourth largest prosecutor’s office in the nation. During his tenure, he tried over 50 jury trial to verdict ranging from misdemeanors to life felonies as a member of the specialized Career Criminal & Robbery Unit.

Tiffany Taylor, Gordon Rees Scully Mansukhani LLP, Atlanta, Georgia

The 2019 DRI Diversity for Success Seminar in New Orleans, Louisiana, is my top-rated seminar experience of all time, hands down. The Diversity & Inclusion Planning Committee found a way to gather great people and good food, and center them around awesome conversation to create memorable events. I enjoyed attending each seminar session. But if I had to give an award for the best seminar session, the award would go to “In 2019 Are We ‘Faking Diversity?’” The seminar discussed the realities of law firm diversity “efforts,” which merely consist of a firm voicing its belief that diversity is important but failing to actively promote and retain diverse talent. We even discussed the misuse of minority attorneys when they are used as “diversity props.” Throughout the seminar session, I was educated, saddened, empowered, and I laughed all

within the time span of sixty minutes. At the end of this session, I knew the Diversity for Success Seminar was not your average seminar.

My favorite experience, however, was meeting other DRI members. When an organization is made up of such remarkable people, it's hard not to be amazed by what they do, their personal stories, or their relentless commitment to diversifying the legal profession. I met so many astonishing people at every juncture during the seminar, including the First-Timers Breakfast, the Networking Happy Hour, and the Dine Arouds. I am excited for what the Diversity

& Inclusion Planning Committee has in store for the 2020 Diversity for Success Seminar. I hope to see you there!



Tiffany Taylor is an associate in the Atlanta office of Gordon Rees Scully Mansukhani LLP and is a member of the Employment practice group. Ms. Taylor represents clients in all areas of employment including Title VII, Section 1981, ADA, ADEA, FLSA, and FMLA.

Prior to joining Gordon & Rees, Ms. Taylor served as a law clerk to a federal district court judge. Ms. Taylor received her juris doctor from Emory University School of Law.



Thursday Diversity Luncheon keynote speaker The Honorable Bernette J. Johnson, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Louisiana.



DRI National Director Pam Carter with Justice Johnson.



Toyja Kelley presents the Sheryl J. Willert Pioneer Diversity Award to Joe Cohen.



Joe Cohen with DRI Diversity and Inclusion Committee Chair Rosary Hernandez



President Kelley and 2019 DRI Diversity Scholarship Winner Anna Fugate.



President Kelley and 2019 DRI Diversity Scholarship Winner Stacy Porche.



Stacy Porche with DRI Diversity and Inclusion Committee Vice Chair Ricardo Woods.