

Inside Out > column



By Christina Martini
DLA Piper



By David Susler
National Material L.P.

Moral and economic reasons

How do you reach diversity in a law firm or company?

Tina Martini: Improving diversity can be really tough, especially in a tough economic environment, because what you are talking about is having a limited number of people to do a job that once took more people. ... At the end of the day, the critical thing to keep in mind when improving diversity is realizing that it's a 24-hour, 365-day-a-year proposition. It is about constantly raising the consciousness and awareness of what diversity means within the context of an organization.

What happens is that when people talk about diversity it isn't a constant conversation. Those things are talked about once or twice a year, when, for example, a law firm is doing recruiting on campus and is talking about the number of people they are hiring. It also ends up being discussed once a year when clients send out diversity surveys, particularly those clients that are very keenly aware and very, very cutting-edge in terms of diversity initiatives. ... To only focus on it during those moments is kind of losing the whole idea behind it. There are a lot of ingredients that go into a successful diversity plan.

David Susler: Can I add something before we go into the ingredients? Along the lines of that conversation, how do you start the conversation and how do you have the conversation?

There are some people out there who will say you have to have diversity because it's just the way it should be. Others would say it's an economic necessity in today's world. There is definitely an economic reason for having diversity. And if that's the way you can get the conversation started in your company — to appeal to the economic basis — then that is what you should do to get the conversation

started ... If doing the right thing or having a work force that is reflective of the world in which we live isn't going to motivate top management to get going on diversity initiatives, then there are two important quotes that I think capture the essence of the economic aspect of the discussion on diversity. First, "The color of diversity is green," which means it's good for business and good for the bottom line. Second, "A rising tide floats all boats." Diversity is not a fad, and it is not a competition. Everyone wins with diversity. That is the first step in how you bring about more diversity. Now do you want to touch on some of the ingredients?

Martini: Sure. These are things to keep in mind and specifics about how to not only get diversity but to maintain it and promote it. One of the most important facets of this is remembering that it is not just diversity, but it's diversity and inclusion. Everyone within an organization needs to be involved in the diversity discussion and in pushing diversity initiatives forward. As part of that, whoever is leading the charge within a particular organization must become keenly aware of who their constituency is. Getting back to what David was saying about the economic versus the moral side of diversity, whoever is in charge of diversity within the organization must be aware of which camp everyone is in. In order to really tailor the message effectively and get people's support you have to know where people are coming from. In many ways it's like politics. Second, diversity training is really important for all employees, to make sure you maximize the chance of success of whatever diversity programs you have in place. Committees on diversity and other types of frameworks within management are important, like a diversity manager. Recruiting, retention and pro-

motion are a huge part of the conversation as well.

What do you do if there are some partners who haven't bought into this idea?

Martini: A lot of it is sitting down with them and discussing it and figuring out where they are coming from. At the end of the day, it's a business enterprise. If they don't really respond to the moral reasons as to why diversity is important — that it's the right thing to do — I think you then explain to them that clients are increasingly requiring it because it enhances job performance and maximizes business opportunities. When you explain it to them from a business standpoint and say "more revenue comes in the door if we satisfy clients by not only achieving a certain level of diversity but by enhancing our performance as a result," I think that argument will really appeal to people. ...

David, as the client, why do you want a diverse group of people at your table?

Susler: We live in a diverse world, and we have a diverse customer base. We have many businesses, we do business all over the world, and it's important to get those unique inputs from people of different backgrounds. Personally, I'm in the camp that it's the right thing to do. ...

But economically we are a business and we need to have the diversity of backgrounds and experiences to come up with solutions which are best for our business. More than 10 years ago some leading general counsels issued the call to action requiring their law firms to diversify. I find it sobering that more than 10 years down the road we are still having to have this conversation, but we do still need to have the conversation. ■

christinamartini.insideout@gmail.com
davidsusler.insideout@gmail.com