

Diversity & Inclusion: It's Not Just for Minorities

By Lori A. Lofano



My name is Lori Lofano. For the past two years I have been a partner in the Detroit office of Bowman and Brooke LLP, and before that I was an associate and partner in the firm's Phoenix office. I have been involved with my

firm's Diversity & Inclusion Committee for close to a decade. Additionally, I have been the publications chair for the DRI Diversity & Inclusion Committee and a member of the committee's steering committee and seminar planning committee for several years. However, I am myself in no way "diverse," as this term is typically used to define people.

I am a white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, heterosexual woman with a white, Irish-Italian, Catholic husband and a white, heterosexual step-son. I live on a small farm outside a village of approximately 900 people that is about 45 miles north of Detroit, where nearly everyone is white and most people would consider themselves middle-class. It is the kind of place where families who moved there twenty years ago are still labeled "outsiders." Before I moved to Michigan, I lived in an equally homogenous neighborhood in suburban Phoenix, and I grew up in the rural Illinois, about sixty miles west of Chicago, also in a primarily white, primarily middle class neighborhood. Racism, racial injustice, and racial equality have never had any effect on my personal or professional life, and there is no objective reason why I should become involved in diversity and inclusion efforts.

Moreover, as a "majority" attorney, being involved with the DRI Diversity & Inclusion Committee is not exactly the path to career advancement. While there are a growing number of conferences, leadership councils, and associations focused on diversity and inclusion, law firms typically send their minority associates to such conferences, or use these opportunities to promote their up-and-coming senior associates and junior partners who are "diverse." Diversity

and inclusion is supposed to be "their" issue, not "my" issue as a majority attorney. Rather, I am supposed to be involved with substantive law committees, or at least with "Women in the Law" committees and initiatives. So why am I so involved with diversity and inclusion?

I am involved because I see my own career development as a means by which I can do my part to rectify injustice in the legal community and the rest of my little corner of the world. It's people like me—white, "majority" Americans—who need to step up, call out racism where we see

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it, and promote equality and inclusion. And if I can promote my firm's activities or those of the teams I work with in the process, so much the better. For example, when my firm's D&I Committee members spoke at an all-attorney trial college that my firm held a few years ago, other committee members spoke about their experiences as diverse people. However, I chose not to speak about myself or my

experiences; rather, I spoke about the team I worked on and how its diverse composition made it a success.

By being involved in such activities, promoting equality, and ending racism—despite being part of the "majority"—I am considered to be an "ally" of the racial equality movement. *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* defines an "ally" as "a person who is not a member of a marginalized or mistreated group but who expresses or gives support to that group." Ally (Entry 2 of 3); available at www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ally. I appreciate that this title acknowledges my efforts. However, Caucasians must do more than "express support" for the struggles of Black Americans and other people of color to live their daily lives; they must stand up for the injustice represented by racism and do their part to end it.

Racism itself divides people into "us" or "them"; indeed, seeing the issue in black and white terms is at the crux of

racism. But, racism is not just an issue for African-Americans, Hispanic/Latino Americans, Native Americans, Asian-Americans, and other people of color, for the simple reason that they are not the ones perpetuating racism. Rather, it must and should only be viewed as an American problem. Yes, those who are at the receiving end of racist actions and policies on a daily basis need to speak out and be at the forefront of moving for change, but Caucasians must be part of the solution, as well, and not part of the problem. Even if not overtly racist themselves, Caucasians who allow racist treatment and practices to continue, through conscious racist actions, by failing to take what action they can to promote equality, or implicitly by doing nothing to stop racism when they see it, are fostering racism. How many Caucasians reading this article have said nothing while someone with whom you were interacting made off-handed, racist statements, assuming you were of a like mind because your skin was the same color? How many of you have heard someone respond to “Black Lives Matter” with “Blue Lives Matter” (as if they were mutually exclusive) or “All Lives Matter” and not corrected the speaker’s misunderstanding? How many of you had made such comments yourself?

I became an attorney, in part, because I believe in justice, fairness, and that “all men are created equal.” This may be “just” an ideal, but it is one that I believe in strongly and try to uphold. And I cannot do so when a large segment of Americans are not receiving justice or being treated fairly, and don’t experience equality in their everyday lives—much less under the law—based solely on skin color.

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