

Championing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Alumni with DEI expertise offer insights into building a better workplace culture

By Todd Nelson

As the nation has grown more diverse, the legal profession has lagged in representation. The racial and social justice movements arising after George Floyd's killing, however, are having a major impact on the legal profession, including law firms, corporations, and public sector organizations.

From corporate legal departments to private law firms and consulting roles, Minnesota Law alumni are striving to advance principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) where they work, with their clients and in the profession.

Building relationships is key to helping diverse attorneys succeed, says Roshan Rajkumar '00, co-managing partner of the Minneapolis office of Bowman and Brooke, co-chair of the firm's diversity and inclusion committee, and an adjunct professor at Minnesota Law.

It's also critical to the health of law firms and the profession.

Rajkumar's way to "radically support" the success of people at all levels of his firm is to let them know who he is, often inviting them to his home for a meal.

At Bowman and Brooke, associates can have a diverse partner in another office who serves as their affinity mentor in addition to an in-office mentor, Rajkumar says.

"How do you convince an associate, in particular diverse associates who are highly coveted in the legal market and not just in the Twin Cities, to come to Bowman and Brooke?" Rajkumar asks.

"I can offer you my mentoring, coaching, opportunities for substantive work, chances to run cases, and I will always have your back. I'm not just going to know you at the office. We are going to play tennis, I'm going to invite you to a concert, I will get to know your family, you'll get to know mine."

Rajkumar implores others to do the same, "to be open to relationships with people who may not look like you or have a background like you have."

He has similar advice for students he mentors and new attorneys. "You need to realize from the first year of law school going forward, every relationship will matter in some way."

With the challenging state of diversity in the Twin Cities legal community—where racial and ethnic minorities in 2020 represented 10 percent of attorneys at big firms, compared to 18 percent nationally,

according to a Minnesota Coalition of Bar Associations of Color report—Rajkumar recommends that law students and lawyers explore affinity bar associations "to see people who may look like you."

"I have to remind people all the time that DEI is about all of us," Rajkumar says. "It's not just up to the Brown and Black attorneys or the diverse attorneys to keep things going. It's all about everyone feeling like they're part of something, that their voice matters and they have the opportunity to be successful."

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Roshan Rajkumar '00