



## WHAT I LEARNED ABOUT INCLUSION AND WHY IT MATTERS

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# CREATING INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS

My personal experiences have fueled my passion and commitment to diversity and inclusion. Being the only or one of the only black people in a classroom, boardroom, or office has afforded me many opportunities to think about diversity and inclusion. Diversity is important because it gives us an opportunity to be challenged and to experience different perspectives.

A demonstrated commitment to diversity and inclusion in law school prepares law students for practice. As Student Bar Association President, I have collaborated with faculty, staff, and students to create an inclusive environment that is welcoming to individuals from all walks of life. One of the simplest ways this has been accomplished is by creating spaces for conversation and storytelling. Often, we have faulty assumptions of others because we haven't had the opportunity to engage in conversation with those who are different from us. We do a good job of this in the legal profession when we take the time to get to know our clients and make them feel valued. It is important that we also create environments where *everyone* in our organization feels empowered to share their story, experiences, and ideas.

Following the death of George Floyd, we partnered with our Black Law Student Association chapter on a movie series that allowed our law school community to have critical conversations on race and the law. This movie series brought together students, faculty, and staff from all backgrounds to discuss important issues within our law school community and the legal profession. This programming sparked a

conversation on how the law school can be more supportive of diverse students and the roles everyone can play in making our environment welcoming. Opportunities for thoughtful and engaging dialogue challenges our thinking, broadens our perspectives, and invites differing point of views.

Representation matters. The more diversity we have within the profession the more diverse people we will have considering the profession as a possibility. Representation has been important to me as an aspiring attorney. Having attorneys with my shared experiences whether it be race, education, or geography has been influential.

We can create inclusive environments by welcoming diverse individuals and creating spaces where everyone can thrive and be their true authentic selves. The onus is not just on diverse individuals to do the work and have the critical conversations. It is a collaborative effort that requires everyone from the managing partner to the administrative assistant. Failing to focus on the inclusion aspect can prevent our organizations from benefiting from the value diversity has to offer.

Working to make your organization more diverse and inclusive can be a daunting task. Conversations around these topics can be challenging but they are important if we want to move this profession forward. I have been most successful in environments where my differences were valued and appreciated. We will never agree on everything, and quite frankly we shouldn't. However, we can all agree that we do our best where we feel like we belong and matter.

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