

# Diversity Matters

by Rachel Clark Hughey



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The legal profession suffers from a disappointing lack of diversity. *The Washington Post* recently published an article titled “Law Is the Least Diverse Profession in the Nation.”<sup>1</sup> The article points out that 88 percent of lawyers are white. Latinos, Asian-Americans, and Native Americans make up fewer than 7 percent of law firm partners. Less than 2 percent of partners in major law firms are black. Things are better—but not by much—for women. Only 20 percent of general counsel of Fortune 500 companies and law school deans are women. A mere 17 percent of equity law firm partners are women.

This is a shame, because diversity matters—it actually makes organizations better. A recent McKinsey study confirms that diverse workforces perform better.<sup>2</sup> The report explains that companies with a more diverse workforce are, among other things, better able to win top talent and improve decision making, and they have better financial performance. Diverse teams have been reported time and time again to be more productive, collaborative, committed, engaged, and innovative.<sup>3</sup>

Even if there were no business reason for diversity—even if diversity did not improve workforce dynamics and results, which it does—most people would agree that diversity still matters on a more basic, moral level. It matters because, for the most part, none of us wants to live in a world where talented, hardworking,

and highly qualified people do not have the same opportunities as others just because of their race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, etc.

While we all should agree that diversity matters, the harder question to answer is “What are we going to do about it?” The legal profession needs to start by acknowledging the extra barriers (unconscious bias and in-group favoritism perhaps being the most pervasive) that diverse attorneys face. We next need to recognize that diversity matters—both morally and financially. Small steps, such as being conscious and purposeful about opportunities given to all attorneys in mentoring relationships and staffing decisions, could go a long way toward overcoming the barriers diverse attorneys face. ☺

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>[www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/05/27/law-is-the-least-diverse-profession-in-the-nation-and-lawyers-arent-doing-enough-to-change-that/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/05/27/law-is-the-least-diverse-profession-in-the-nation-and-lawyers-arent-doing-enough-to-change-that/) (Last visited Feb. 12, 2016.); see [www.nalp.org/lawfirmdiversity\\_feb2015](http://www.nalp.org/lawfirmdiversity_feb2015).

<sup>2</sup>[www.mckinsey.com/insights/organization/why\\_diversity\\_matters](http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/organization/why_diversity_matters) (last visited Feb. 12, 2016.)

<sup>3</sup>*Id.*; [smallbusiness.chron.com/advantages-diverse-workforce-18780.html](http://smallbusiness.chron.com/advantages-diverse-workforce-18780.html).

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