

3 KEY TAKEAWAYS

Talk is Cheap: How Law Firms Can Affect Real Change Through Deliberate Diversity and Intentional Inclusion

By [Vanessa Hardee](#), Senior Marketing Coordinator, [Kilpatrick Townsend](#)

Recently, an impressive group of thought leaders gathered at a meeting of the [Raleigh, North Carolina chapter of the Legal Marketing Association](#) to offer their insights at the monthly program titled “Talk is Cheap: How Law Firms Can Affect Real Change Through Deliberate Diversity & Intentional Inclusion.”

Panelists included:

- **Chris Kirby** (Moderator), Chairman & Founder, The BridgeField Group
- **Tamika Walters, Esq.**, Senior Diversity & Inclusion Manager, Kilpatrick Townsend
- **Tim Wilson**, Senior Intellectual Property Counsel, SAS
- **Denisse Gonzalez**, Corporate Counsel, Cisco
- **Shawna Cannon Lemon**, Co-Managing Shareholder, Stanek Lemon
- **Betsy Burton-Strunk**, Thurgood Marshall College Fund

Ms. Walters offers her key takeaways from the presentation:

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Why Law Firms Need Diversity & Inclusion

- **Diversity does not work without inclusion.** To promote diversity without intentional inclusion is like inviting someone to the party but then not asking them to dance. Everyone wants to feel included and have a sense of belonging. It is human nature to leave when one does not feel included, so inclusion is necessary to combat attrition.
- **To remain competitive, law firms must understand their clients and their diversifying customer base.** An increasing number of clients are demanding diverse legal teams because diverse teams bring different perspectives to the table that allow for more innovation and better problem-solving skills. Diversity is both the right thing to do and better for business overall.
- **Inclusion does not mean taking anything away from a particular group.** Inclusion means ensuring that all groups have equal opportunities and that no one faces obstacles to success simply because of their demographic background.

Giving Credit Where Credit is Due

- **No one wants to feel used.** When diverse attorneys are included in pitch and RFP materials in order to win new work but are purposely excluded from the rewards that follow, it can increase feelings of frustration, isolation, and tokenism. These sorts of exploitative practices may be severe enough to cause someone to leave a firm entirely, which would be a lose-lose situation for the both the individual and the firm.
- **Clients are catching on.** Many now require firms to prove that their diverse talent are actually getting the work. Forward-thinking firms are starting to track the relationships between business development activity and the resulting billables. Law firm marketing departments may assist with these efforts by proactively gathering and sharing this data with firm leadership.

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How You Can Affect Real Change

- **Get support from leadership.** To make an impact, the message ultimately needs to come from the top. Establish a committee whose priority is to ensure deliberate diversity and intentional inclusion, and enlist firm leaders as members.
- **Look at your numbers.** Look not only at the basic diversity of your workforce, but periodically review billables and worked amount numbers to determine if they may reflect potential issues relating to inclusion.
- **Recruit the whole person.** Limiting recruitment efforts to only a handful of schools results in many missed opportunities to meet talented lawyers and potential rainmakers. Law school rankings are important but not the end-all-be-all determinant of suitability or success. Outstanding work ethic, the capacity to juggle competing priorities, business acumen, interpersonal skills, and overall life experience can be found at a range of schools.
- **Counteract bias with education.** Present firm-wide trainings on topics such as unconscious bias and inclusive leadership. Plan firm-wide programs that serve to teach employees about diversity and cultural heritage. Break down the barriers that make people feel like diverse coworkers are the “other.” Create a culture that respects differences and allows people to be their authentic selves in the workplace.
- **Make inclusion deliberate.** Retain diverse talent through intentional inclusion. Build diverse clients teams to provide clients with well-rounded perspectives and legal skillsets. Establish a mentor program pairing associates with partners, provide partners with the guidance and tools needed to mentor effectively, and check in on progress.
- **Build a pipeline.** Help support the future slate of diverse talent. Invest in scholarships and training programs for students interested in the legal profession. Adopt a local school in an economically disadvantaged area, and look for ways to support the education and professional development of the students. Look for opportunities in the community where you can support diversity, such as the [Thurgood Marshall College Fund](#) and other

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