

Change *is* Coming

Everyone will change.
Everything must change.



BEVERIDGE & DIAMOND

By Jodi Bartle

The George B. Vashon Innovator Award is presented to companies (outside of the Fortune 1000) and/or law firms (with less than 500 attorneys) who have shown to lead the way with innovative best practices to assist diverse attorneys. The award is named for George B. Vashon, a scholar, abolitionist, and lawyer who was the first licensed African American lawyer in the NY State (1848) and was one of the first attorneys admitted to practice before the US Supreme Court (1867).

Two winners share this year's award; law firms Beveridge & Diamond and Shook, Hardy & Bacon, highlighted for their respective efforts in recruitment, retention, promotion of diverse lawyers and for the implementation of practices which impact and break barriers to entry for diversity attorneys. We spoke with Nessa Horewitch Copping, D&I Principal from Beveridge & Diamond and Madeleine McDonough, Chair of Shook, Hardy & Bacon as to why diversity and inclusion remains such an important issue and what they have learned from successes and failures in walking the D&I talk.

VASHON AWARD - BEVERIDGE & DIAMOND

Diversity & the Bar: Congratulations on your win. Covering the basics, why do you think Diversity and inclusion remains such an important issue for corporate America?

Nessa Horewitch Copping: D&I remains an important issue for corporate America because our society is diverse. Corporate leadership should reflect our diverse society; and diverse teams lead to better outcomes. Diversity is critical to corporate success.

D&tB: What sets Beveridge & Diamond apart from other firms in its implementation of innovative and creative D&I initiatives - what do you think gives you an edge?

NHC: While there are certainly a lot of firms doing great work in this space, at B&D we have truly made D&I a core value for more than a decade, and in doing so have been willing to get out in front on D&I issues. Ben Wilson, our firm Chairman, is a leading advocate for diversity in the legal profession. B&D is

MCCA



GEORGE B. VASHON INNOVATOR AWARD

small enough that we are not bound by rigid policies, but big enough that we can devote resources to making change. We pride ourselves on being forward thinking in all aspects of our professional lives, and that includes D&I.

D&tB: Can you provide a flavor of your programme highlights and any particular success stories?

NHC: We have created very successful partnerships with our clients and diversity-related organizations that we think help us "advance together" - which is incidentally MCCA's theme this year. For example, we partner with a host of external organizations such as the Leadership Council on a Legal Diversity, National Association of Women Lawyers, National Bar Association, and of course MCCA, to support our diverse attorneys, educate our firm, and develop the pipeline of diverse attorneys. We also stress inclusion at the firm - for example, we spent a lot of time over the past few years improving communication and helping connect our people and offices in meaningful ways.

One of our biggest successes has been our flexible work arrangements. We have seen very promising attorneys stay with the firm because we've worked together to find arrangements that suit people's varying needs.



WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN ADVANCING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION. LAW FIRMS AND CLIENTS NEED TO CHALLENGE EACH OTHER TO DO BETTER. WE ARE ALWAYS VERY EXCITED WHEN ONE OF OUR CLIENTS FINDS A NEW WAY TO PROMOTE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN THE PROFESSION...

D&tB: In what ways have you learnt from your failures and successes over time in the process of implementing D&I?

NHC: We try to measure whether what we do is working so we can see where our resources are best spent. For example, every two years we conduct a wide-ranging firm-wide survey on a host of D&I related issues. We use the results of that survey to set priorities for the next two years and to see whether our focus on certain issues has resulted in improvement as reflected in the survey. We've learned that the most important way to progress is to start by listening.

D&tB: How can leaders best impact workplace culture?

NHC: I think the best way for leaders to impact workplace culture is to lead by example. It is not enough to talk about the importance of a diverse and inclusive workplace; leaders must "walk the walk" by demanding diversity in their organizations. At Beveridge & Diamond, we take this to mean:

- Adequately funding D&I initiatives, including pipeline initiatives, involvement with external organizations, and internal inclusion and training efforts;
- Being forward-thinking and mindful of diversity in leadership development and succession planning (and considering such issues in shareholder compensation);
- Attending and participating in D&I events and promoting them within the firm;
- Actively raising D&I issues during discussions with shareholders and clients;
- Willingness to take on innovative D&I programs with clients.

D&tB: What does the legal profession have to do in a practical sense to effect change?

NHC: So many things need to change, but practically I think there are a few key things we can do now. For a start, we need to focus on building the pipeline of diverse attorneys. Clients need to demand that firms not only have diverse teams, but diverse lead or relationship partners. We need to share origination credit at firms, and we need to become aware of and be willing to challenge implicit bias as it plays out in our workplaces - allies are the key to change here.

D&tB: Do the concepts of 'diversity' and 'innovation' have a connection?

NHC: There are plenty of studies that demonstrate that diversity leads to better outcomes. When you have ideas coming from a group of people who have different life experiences, different perspectives, and different priorities, you are more likely to come up with truly innovative ideas. But, everyone has to be open to listening and to doing things differently.

D&tB: What are the ways in which the legal profession can advance together on D&I?

NHC: We all have a role to play in advancing diversity and inclusion in the legal profession. Law firms and clients need to challenge each other to do better. We are always very excited when one of our clients finds a new way to promote diversity and inclusion in the profession, and we have piloted several D&I-related client-driven initiatives. Our clients challenge us to staff matters with diverse lawyers, and we challenge them to choose diverse lawyers to be relationship partners and lead lawyers on their matters in order to advance diverse lawyers at firms - not just at Beveridge & Diamond.