

**THE CURRENT STATE OF****D&I****PART 2:****A Conversation  
with the  
Legal Profession**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: A longtime Partner at Hunton & Williams LLC and former president of the ABA, Robert Grey now serves as President of the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity (LCLD). Founded in 2009 to build a more open and diverse legal profession, LCLD today is comprised of more than 260 general counsel of Fortune 500 companies and the managing partners of the country's major law firms. Since 2011 LCLD has launched a number of programs for diverse individuals ranging from law school students to senior partner-level attorneys in firms and corporations. The following Q&A was conducted by Mr. Grey with a group of LCLD Fellows and their colleagues.*

**ROBERT GREY WRITES:**

Since 1968 CLEO has been focused on its mission: diversifying the U.S. legal profession. While LCLD works with the top leaders of the profession to achieve that goal, CLEO has worked for many decades at the grassroots level, and has succeeded in impacting the lives and professional trajectory of thousands of diverse lawyers, even as diversity in the profession has changed and attitudes and approaches continue to evolve. As CLEO approaches its 50th anniversary, we thought we'd take stock of where we are and how far we've come as a legal profession.

As president of LCLD, I've had the distinct pleasure of working with the profession's leaders to think creatively about diversity and inclusion; more importantly, I've worked with the LCLD membership to create a unique talent-to-leadership trajectory through our program offerings. In doing so, we interact with thousands of diverse lawyers, some of whom have contributed their thoughts on the state of diversity and inclusion in the legal profession today.

**ROBERT GREY [RG]:**

*Has diversity changed since you started your legal career – either in how it's defined, how it's discussed, or how it's being measured? If so, how has it changed and what impact has that had? What/who has influenced the change?*

**Darwin Conner:**

How diversity is viewed has certainly changed since I began my career way back in 1999, after I graduated. Back then, firms kept their eye open for diverse talent, but were perfectly satisfied taking no steps to improve diverse recruiting or retention efforts. Although the numbers in the legal industry are still dismal when it comes to diversity, I think firms have been reassessing not just how diversity fits in with institutional culture, but how a lack of diversity affects the bottom line. It has become apparent to many in firm leadership that clients are aware of poor performance when it comes to recruiting, retaining, granting opportunity, and promoting diverse talent. Continually failing without actively assessing firm performance and taking corrective steps towards creating a diverse firm with a culture in which everyone has the same types of opportunities is no longer acceptable. “It’s hard,” and “There isn’t enough diverse talent,” are no longer viable excuses. As more and more Fortune 500 and other companies continue to make it known that they will take their business to the firms that are successful in their diversity efforts, the more things will evolve.

Darwin Conner, a 2013 LCLD Fellow, is a partner at Sullivan & Worcester in New York.



**Chasity Boyce and Tiffany Harper:**



*Chasity Boyce*

In 2013 we co-founded the Diverse Attorney Pipeline Program (DAPP), the first and only pipeline program that focuses on connecting 1L, women of color law students with opportunity and resources. Our approach is hands-on and focuses on empowering women of color and providing a strong academic and professional foundation for those populations who have the most barriers to accessing prestigious positions in big law. Organizations like LCLD and DAPP

are the future of diversity and inclusion efforts in the legal profession because they give diverse attorneys opportunities that are not naturally created for them inside of firms. Lack of opportunity is rarely the by-product of an intentional act. Instead, it’s the result of a culture built by non-diverse individuals, an antiquated system that is struggling to keep up with every other professional market.

Tiffany Harper and Chasity Boyce are the co-founders of the Diverse Attorney Pipeline Program (DAPP), a 501(c)(3) organization with the mission of cultivating and developing women of color law students into the next generation of diverse lawyers, and the co-founders of a blog that focuses on diversity issues in corporate America, Uncolorblind.

**RG:** *Do junior lawyers view diversity differently than senior lawyers? If so, how do you think that will shape diversity and inclusion work going forward?*



**Cecilly Shelton:**

I believe junior lawyers do view diversity more broadly than senior lawyers. I think junior lawyers also view diversity as being more attainable than senior lawyers. Junior lawyers are developing their careers in an environment where an African-American president has served two terms and the first female presidential candidate has been nominated. For junior lawyers, diversity has become more of an expectation. In contrast, senior lawyers developed their careers in an atmosphere where this was unheard of; having the benefit and burden of being pioneers for diversity and inclusion work. I expect that junior lawyers’ views of diversity will drive inclusion work to become the status quo for more organizations.

For junior lawyers, diversity is likely more than one’s ethnicity or gender. Differing ages, experiences and sexual preferences now contribute to junior lawyers’ standards for diversity. I expect that as more legal organizations and their clients embrace the power of

social media for marketing that junior lawyers will be more sought after. In turn, junior lawyers will be more apt at shaping inclusion initiatives that encompass the broader attributes of diversity.

Cecilly Shelton, a 2014 LCLD Fellow, and a partner at Shelton Law LLP in Atlanta.

**RG:** *What still needs to be done? Is there anything that gives you hope that we are making progress and moving towards a more diverse legal profession?*

**Tienne Anderson:** While we have miles to go, hope springs eternal. People are paying more attention to the diversity and inclusion conversation now and it has gone from a fringe issue to a mainstream policy component for many businesses and firms. I am encouraged to see the nuance and depth of this ongoing discussion highlight new challenges and areas for improvement. It is not enough to hire a Diversity and Inclusion coordinator, convene a D&I committee or support affinity groups. Leadership is crucial and what truly gives me hope is to see (through various experiences, including LCLD) white, hetero males step up to the plate and help drive the conversation forward. There is widespread recognition that this is not simply an issue for “other” people to deal with, but must be a part of everyone’s daily work, from the CEO to the sanitation engineer and everyone in between. This recognition is crucial and will drive progress in new and exciting ways going forward, creating a more diverse and richer legal profession as a result.

Tienne Anderson, a 2015 LCLD Fellow, is legal counsel at Medtronic, Inc.

**ROBERT GREY WRITES:**

The profession has been working on diversity and inclusion for several decades and while the progress may be slow, there is reason to be hopeful. LCLD’s leadership-driven approach to diversity and inclusion sends the message that a more diverse legal profession is everyone’s responsibility. Meanwhile, a shift towards a more metrics-driven approach provides hope for more substantive outcomes.

LCLD sees a path forward, founded on our commitment to leadership, action and results. At the time of publication of this article, we are celebrating our seventh anniversary and are excited to report that our members remain committed to our core principles.

LCLD will continue to rely on its “leadership, action, results” model as we focus on three guiding principles. First, whenever possible collaborate with others to work towards a common goal; there is strength in numbers. Second, set goals and measure outcomes. Be prepared to be honest in how you evaluate your progress and don’t be afraid to reframe your goals and try alternate routes. Finally, be open to innovation. It’s clear from the commentary above that today’s lawyers are anxious for change and willing and able to be trailblazers. As CLEO has been doing for nearly 50 years—and LCLD has for seven—empowering these talented attorneys is an important part of the solution. 🙌



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