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Work It, Girl!: Diversity, Inc.

CREATING – AND MAINTAINING – A DIVERSE WORKFORCE

by joyce wiswell | photo by daniel lippitt

As a black woman in a field filled with white men, Phyllis Golden Morey knows what it's like to stand out.

"I have certainly had experiences, especially early in my career, when I walked into a meeting, and they were expecting someone who looked different," says the attorney, who is a shareholder at Brooks Kushman P.C., an intellectual property law firm in Southfield.

When the firm recently decided to step up its efforts to attract a diverse workforce, it tapped Morey for the newly created position of chief diversity officer.

The benefits to hiring people from all walks of life are numerous, she says.

"Diversity is important because when we find people who have had similar experiences, their opportunities to think outside the box are more limited," Morey, 51, says.

Phyllis Golden Morey's tips for a diverse workplace:

Open minds

Some employees might resent the addition of coworkers who are different, Morey says.

"It will be discomfoting initially, but my words are that you should embrace the discomfort," she says. "You will grow as an individual, you will learn some things, and you will share some things."

Reach out

Morey is constantly spreading the word about Brooks Kushman's diversity efforts.

"Network with diverse people who can make referrals. Look at who you know in your industry who is diverse, and start a dialogue with that person," she says.

Morey keeps in touch with minority chambers of commerce and other professional organizations.

"I don't want to speak at one of their meetings because I don't want to be barraged with 50 résumés from people who don't have the skill sets, but I do talk behind the scenes," she says.



Read between the lines

Study a candidate's cover letter and résumé carefully for clues to their background. People don't generally come out and state their ethnicity, Morey says, but they will mention if they belong to an organization that comprises minorities, such as Black Career Women or the National Association of Asian American Professionals.

"Sometimes the college they went to can be an indicator," she adds.

Detroit's Marygrove College and the Lewis College of Business both have large African-American student bodies, Morey says. Ask professors who teach in your field to recommend outstanding minority students.

Make everyone belong

Each new hire at Brooks Kushman is assigned a mentor, which not only helps the employee feel welcome, it greatly reduces turnover, Morey says.

"Our mantra is to make everyone feel connected. If you have close ties, it is harder for you to walk away," she says.

In addition, Morey reaches out to minority employees by taking them to lunch and making sure they are included in activities of interest.

Tout your successes

Brooks Kushman is unique in that more than 25% of its workforce is female, a very high number in the male-dominated field of intellectual property, Morey says.

"Because most intellectual property boutique law firms are comprised primarily of people who were engineering majors in college and who thereafter attended law school, most IP firms are comprised mostly of male patent lawyers," Morey says. "This male-dominated phenomenon resulted from the fact that for decades, most engineers have been men; consequently, most patent attorneys have been men, as well.

"... We just hired three women with Ph.D.s, and the fact that we have more women was a draw to them. When a diverse candidate sees that we have multiple diverse backgrounds, that helps sell the firm."