

Diversity

issues



Is Diversity on YOUR Agenda?

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Last week I was having lunch with Jeff Swillinger and we were talking about the Diversity Committee's annual Diversity Day and how apprehensive I felt about writing an article discussing this year's program. After all, the term diversity means different things to different people – "broad" is an understatement. In response to my uneasiness, he gave me this quote from Rep. John Lewis, the only surviving speaker from the March on Washington, who spoke during the "Let Freedom Ring" commemorative event in August 2013:

"Fifty years later, we can ride anywhere we want to ride, we can stay where we want to stay, those signs that said white and colored are gone, and you won't see them anymore except in a museum, in a book, or on a video... But there are still invisible signs, barriers in the hearts of human kind that form a gulf between us."

I have spent half of my career representing corporate clients. I have spent the other half representing clients who have experienced discrimination and unfair treatment because of race, poverty, mental illness, addiction, and criminal records. My professional experience has shown me that barriers in the human heart do indeed form gulfs around race, class, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, religion, and other issues. These gulfs plague society at large, and they also pose serious challenges for the legal profession.

Diversity, fairness, inclusion, and bias dramatically impact not only who becomes an attorney, but also who ultimately succeeds as one. These issues affect how legal disputes are resolved, how we interact with the clients we represent, and how we determine who gets that representation. Perhaps most importantly, they impact the public perception of our profession and the public's trust in the legal system. As committee member Judge Jeffrey Froelich observed, "Our system

of avoiding and resolving disputes among people and between people and their government depends on its legitimacy. If people do not believe, and have a long-term basis in fact for the belief, that our justice system is fair, accessible and neutral and provides to every person the process to which they are due, it will not survive. People will ignore the judgments of the courts and the established rules and take the law into their own hands."

Accordingly, the theme of this year's program is "Is Diversity on YOUR Agenda?" Our committee feels that diversity should be on the agenda of each and every DBA committee. During this year's program, we will present speakers from other DBA committees who will address how diversity and its attendant issues of fairness, inclusion, and access to representation impact their particular area of the law. Speakers from these committees will participate with the goal of making those in attendance aware of, and sensitive to, discrimination and the disparate impacts that so often flow from facially neutral laws, regulations, customs, and even our own professional norms.

In addition to discussing issues related to various substantive areas of the law, here are some of the global questions we hope to address during this year's program:

- What does diversity mean and why does it continue to present a challenge for the legal community?

- What does "sensitizing" mean? Why is it important and how is it best accomplished?

- What should DBA committees be doing to address issues of diversity, inclusion, discrimination and access to representation?

2013 was a year of significant decisions from the United States Supreme Court regarding same sex marriage, voting rights, affirmative action, and criminal procedure.

It appears that the upcoming term will be no less significant, with the Court expected to render decisions on racial discrimination, free speech, and the separation of church and state. In this rapidly shifting legal landscape, we are called upon to consider not only how these changes affect our substantive areas of practice, but also the implications for our profession as a whole. Emphasizing the obligation each of us has to engage in this consideration, Judge Froelich stated: "It is indeed correct that increasing inclusion in the bar, inures economically to the practice. But even if it did not, it is at the heart of being an attorney in a democracy. It is the responsibility of the bench and bar, and their committees, to inform themselves how diversity and inclusion affect, or should affect, what they do with that substantive law and consider what they can do to add to the legitimacy of our justice system."

It is our sincere hope that this year's program will create a lasting legacy for the entirety of the DBA, with every committee making diversity, fairness, inclusion and access to representation regular items on the agenda. We hope to see all of you there. ●

Register Today!

www.daybar.org

Diversity Day

Friday, April 4th

DIVERSITY DAY 2014

Is Diversity on YOUR Agenda?

Friday, April 4, 2014 Sinclair College, Building 12
8:30-11:45am CLE 12:00-1:00pm Luncheon 3.0 CLE hours

Agenda

- 8:30-8:45am
Introduction: Importance of diversity to the Bar, to Bar Associations, to our client base and to the rule of law
- 8:45-9:40am
Family Law: Probate, Domestic Relations, Juvenile, Bankruptcy
- 9:40-10:35am
Business Law: Labor Relations, Corporate, Workers Compensation/Social Security, Employee Benefits
- 10:35-10:50am Break
- 10:50-11:45am
Litigation: Municipal, State and Federal Law, Civil and Criminal, Appellate
- Noon-1:15pm
Lunch & Program: How to assure increased diversity in the future, through the pipeline projects - SWEL and Law & Leadership Institute

How to Attend:

Register online at www.daybar.org or call 222-7902

DBA Member:
Seminar: \$105 | Lunch: \$25 | Both: \$115

NonMember:
Seminar: \$140 | Lunch: \$35 | Both: \$160

Passport Member: \$30

General Public: \$30

Table of 8 for Luncheon Only: \$200