

SPRING 2024

DIVERSITY MATTERS NEWSLETTER

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EDITORS' NOTE

By: Elizabeth U. Okakpu and Laura Seider



Elizabeth U. Okakpu



Laura Seider

“Our people made that choice, the choice to go to Sameness... We relinquished color when we relinquished sunshine and did away with a difference. We gained control of many things. But we had to let go of others.”

-The Giver, By Lois Lowry

In *The Giver*, society is called Utopia and life is heavily regulated. Deviations from the societal standard are isolated and eliminated. Citizens are unaware that they are deprived of experiencing emotions, seeing color, and access to society’s histories. Instead, the memories of these things are collectively stored in one isolated individual, the Giver, who serves as an advisor to society and a living relic of the past. The book explores what happens when a new “Giver” is selected and begins his training- accepting and experiencing each emotion, each color, and each memory for the very first time. The protagonist begins to question whether “sameness” is worth the sacrifice of individuality. Although written in 1993, *The Giver*’s themes remain ever relevant, yet keep it a constant on the list(s) of those who deal in the banning of books.

This edition of the newsletter arrives on the eve of Spring, but during a time when groups seek to suppress history, voter rights, and free speech, and to ultimately divide more than to unite. The need for honest and open conversation remains more present than ever. More than race, color, or religion, diversity can cover any and all things. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is defined as “a conceptual framework that promotes the fair treatment and full participation of all people, especially in the workplace, including populations who have historically been underrepresented or subject to discrimination because of their background,

identity, disability, etc.” Dictionary.com. The Diversity Committee remains steadfast in its mission of fostering a WG community as a safe space where all viewpoints are welcome and respected.

The DEI Committee offers the latest edition of its newsletter in recognition that exposure to varying viewpoints of those unlike oneself offers the opportunity for greater dialogue and, hopefully, understanding. This edition, we offer perspectives on the discussions about the relevancy of DEI initiatives/programs in the legal field, allyship during the Ramadan season, the perils of Imposter Syndrome, CLE requirements with a diversity focus and WG’s ongoing DEI initiatives and happenings.

As the newest editors of the DEI Newsletter, we invite you to read it with an open mind and join us in these ongoing conversations. All perspectives are welcome. We hope to hear from you soon.



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WEBER GALLAGHER'S DEI ACTION CHECKLIST

- Join Weber Gallagher's Diversity & Inclusion Committee and actively participate.
- Recommend a diverse attorney or staff person for employment at Weber Gallagher.
- Write an article about diversity and inclusion for Weber Gallagher's diversity newsletter, Diversity Matters!
- Attend one (1) or more conferences, programs, or CLE seminars on diversity-related topics.
- Attend one (1) or more program(s) sponsored by Weber Gallagher's Diversity Committee.
- Participate in "The Breakroom," a small group discussion fostering a safe place to share your thoughts and experiences while learning about your colleagues.
- Read an article or book about diversity and inclusion.
- Develop a mentoring relationship with an attorney, law school graduate, or law student of a diverse background.
- Mentor a high school student, college student, or paralegal interested in pursuing a career in law.
- Learn about the impact of subtle, unconscious, and implicit bias by visiting Project Implicit at <http://www.projectimplicit.net> and take one of the surveys.



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Are We Doing It All Wrong?

By:  **Laura Seider** and  **Merve Ocak**

It is undeniable that in just a few short years, the country has made huge strides in embracing our diversity and standing up to the negative “isms” that have plagued our society for far too long. We have seen large and small companies, law firms, and educational institutions make significant positive changes in order to promote diversity and create fair and welcoming environments. But, as with all social progress that confronts deeply imbedded cultural norms, backlash against DEI initiatives has been growing like wildfire, and the legal industry is not immune. The opposition has come in many forms, from small editorial pieces, to landmark Supreme Court cases. Opponents have claimed that DEI initiatives are sometimes too extreme. The response does not appear to be slowing down, and may in fact be growing.

While our knee jerk reaction may be to write off these attacks as coming from a small minority of people who will never be accepting of social change for one reason or another, this would be a colossal mistake. Of course, there will always be some people with ill intentions on either side of any debate. But it is irrefutable that our country’s strides towards embracing diversity have happened relatively quickly, which undoubtedly has left some of our fellow citizens and neighbors feeling hesitant, left behind, excluded, or ignored. In fact, much of the concern or even rejection of DEI initiatives is not coming from a place of hate. Rather, it is likely a combination of misunderstanding our purpose, and conflating all DEI initiatives with headline-grabbing lawsuits over controversial initiatives and programs, hiring practices or college admissions procedures which, while good-intentioned, are perceived by many to be unfair.

Growing Tensions and Competing Points of View

A significant portion of the pushback against DEI has focused on the fact that many DEI initiatives center around race. In the summer of 2023, the Supreme Court decided 2 cases regarding the role of affirmative action in college admissions at the University of North Carolina and Harvard. The Court split along ideological lines and

concluded that these practices violated the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment, holding that many universities “have concluded, wrongly, that the touchstone of an individual’s identity is not challenges bested, skills built, or lessons learned but the color of their skin.”

In our own backyard, Zack DiPiero, a former professor at Penn State University filed a lawsuit against the school alleging that the school’s DEI initiatives discriminated against him in violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 because he is white. Of course, this is a complex topic involving competing interests and points of view, and is representative of much of what we have been seeing nationwide as we navigate these complicated issues.

Hitting even closer to home are the multiple lawsuits and threats of lawsuits served on law firms opposing practices that appear to be focused on racial “quotas” in hiring, recruiting, and advancement. In response to the lawsuits, multiple firms abandoned programs, including fellowship programs that sought to hire minority applicants. Others were able to avoid litigation by making changes to their programs to indicate a race neutral approach to recruiting and hiring, while still being able to encourage applicants from disadvantaged groups to apply.

What Can We Do?

Maybe the most important lesson we can learn from this is that we should be committing just as much time to “inclusion” as we do to “diversity” and “equity.” We should ACTIVELY LISTEN to those with different points of view and different experiences in response to the recent development of DEI initiatives. After all, isn’t that the very foundation of DEI? Diversity is more than just skin color or race, though race has been and continues to be at the forefront of the movement. There is no doubt that racial inequality and the resulting lack of diversity in college admissions, the legal profession, and elsewhere in the business world is an issue of critical importance, and we should continue to focus time and energy on promoting racial diversity in all facets of society. But,



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Are We Doing It All Wrong? *continued*

By: Laura Seider and Merve Ocak

diversity can and should be considered all-encompassing: skin color, race, religion, heritage, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status and upbringing, family structure, political viewpoints, experiences, disabilities (physical and mental/emotional)—the list goes on and on. There is no reason why we cannot work to incorporate ALL forms of diversity into our goals and initiatives. In fact, the current climate dictates that we do so, in order to continue moving forward.

Diversity of viewpoint, especially when those viewpoints are driven by our background and experiences, is vital to the success of DEI initiatives at companies and institutions with a genuine desire to create DIVERSE and INCLUSIVE environments. And making an effort to “diversify” our diversity initiatives will go a long way towards inviting our fellow citizens who have felt uncomfortable and left out, to actively participate in developing and carrying out our initiatives.



As with anything in life, this is a work in progress. We are certainly not there yet, and the more people we have on board, the further we can go. As the great Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “Our very survival depends on our ability to stay awake, to adjust to new ideas, to remain vigilant and to face the challenge of change.” So let us embrace the challenges to our DEI initiatives as an opportunity to adjust our approach and continue to move forward, with the goal of welcoming all our fellow citizens into our movement towards true diversity, equity, and inclusion.

As individuals, there are a multitude of ways we can promote the true values underlying DEI initiatives, including true diversity of people and viewpoints. As we move through 2024, we will highlight the ways in which individuals can work to both educate ourselves and provide an inclusive and comfortable environment at work and in our personal lives. For starters, let’s all try to be an ally. For each newsletter, we invite you to submit a topic to further the DEI discussion to help us all be better allies.



A Journey to Wellness Begins With Changes in Law Firm Culture

By:



Jesse Hallinan

This is going to go exactly how you think it will ... more or less.

My name is Jesse and I'm an alcoholic. I'm also an attorney. The story told here is about me. Not about my accomplishments (few), but about my mistakes (many). I've told this story many times in community center basements, church recreation halls, and all the common rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous. As of the date of this article, I haven't had a drop of alcohol in 4,153 days. I guess when they say "one day at a time," they mean it.

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Being An Ally: Understanding and Sharing During Ramadan



By:

Merve Ocak

Though the legal field experiences backlash and scrutiny due to DEI initiatives, it remains that having more diverse perspectives provides more thoughtful and inclusive results. It helps us be more well-rounded and engaged with those around us from different backgrounds as it is important to create an engaging and welcoming atmosphere for all individuals, regardless of their ethnic, racial, or religious backgrounds (though this list is in no means meant to be exhaustive).

One important component, and a term often used in the context of DEI, is allyship. While DEI addresses issues of representation and creating spaces where everyone feels they belong, allyship is about advocating and supporting individuals different from your own identity group. Allies listen to and amplify the voices of others while educating themselves and contributing to building a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment.

Allyship especially takes on an added significance during times like Ramadan as it presents an opportunity for allies to support Muslim colleagues by understanding and respecting their religious practices. As many of you may be aware, the month of Ramadan began on March 11, 2024. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, observed as a period of fasting, prayer, reflection, and community. It is considered the holiest month in Islam and is a time where practicing Muslims abstain from certain activities, including eating and drinking (yes, even water) from dawn until sunset. It is a time of increased acts of charity and meant to cultivate virtues such as patience, gratitude, and empathy. Those who observe Ramadan often wake up to have a light meal and water before the sun rises. Once the sun goes down, families and communities come together to break their fast, gathering for a meal, which is also called "iftar."



How Can You Be An Ally During Ramadan?

When a Muslim colleague or friend tells you they are observing Ramadan, you can say "Ramadan Mubarak" (Happy Ramadan) to acknowledge and celebrate with them or ask them how their fast is going. Sometimes, it can be as simple as asking about what they are looking forward to at dinner time. Oftentimes, those who fast will experience fatigue or low energy from the lack of food, and especially coffee, during times of Ramadan. As an ally, it is important to keep this in mind and accommodate your colleagues during this time. These simple acknowledgements will go a long way in building relationships and ensuring our colleagues and friends feel welcome, heard, and understood. Not to mention, engaging with a Muslim colleague with these simple conversations opens up an opportunity for YOU to learn something!

As our understanding of other traditions grows, we also grow in our ability to connect, to relate, and to be an ally. We can focus on allyship by educating ourselves, asking questions, engaging in community events which we normally may not participate in, and allow allyship to take a form of positivity.



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CLE & DEI: IT MAY BE TIME TO CONSIDER SIGNING UP FOR CLE THAT HAVE A DEI FOCUS

By:  Elizabeth U. Okakpu



Compliance with Continuing Legal Education (CLE) credit minimums is necessary to remain an active attorney. Failure to meet CLE requirements, even by oversight, can result in an inactive status, a costly and time consuming designation to remedy.

CLE credit requirements vary by state, with many governing bodies requiring that some number of those credits be devoted to ethics/professionalism. Some states are going one step further and adding a DEI component. On January 1, 2021, New Jersey updated its CLE requirements to reflect the importance of DEI programs. Two of its five ethics/professionalism credits must now be concentrated in “Diversity, inclusion, and the elimination of bias.”

Pennsylvania has also updated its CLE requirements to include a minimum of 1.0 credit hours relating to diversity, inclusion, and anti-bias. New York has a similar requirement; 1.0 credit in Diversity, Inclusion, and elimination of bias. In January 2022, Delaware also rolled out a strategic plan for improving diversity in the Delaware bar and bench, which may signal future changes to CLE credit requirements.

Nine other states have made CLE credits in diversity mandatory: California, Colorado, Illinois, Maine, Minnesota, Missouri, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington.

For those of us not licensed in the named states with a diversity requirement, it may be time to proactively look for ethics/professionalism credits geared towards diversity.



Each attorney is responsible for meeting CLE requirements to maintain practice. For more information, check CLE requirements for state(s) you are licenses to practice in.



Definition of Imposter Syndrome

By:  Christina Raton

“My experience with imposter syndrome first started when I made the decision to become a lawyer. As a first generation everything in my immediate family, creating my own path was incredibly difficult. In my case, with a family that is so heavily involved in the medical field, being the first lawyer in the entire family made it almost impossible to seek mentorship and encouragement. I often kept my challenges and failures throughout law school to myself and there were many times when my accomplishments were not celebrated, but instead, forgotten.”

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IMPOSTER SYNDROME

By:  Chelsea Seidel

At any given moment, that tiny voice in your mind can whisper doubts about your worthiness or belonging. Whether you are the youngest in the room or feeling like the odd one out at a table where everyone appears to have it all figured out, the grip of imposter syndrome can strike unexpectedly. Battling against self-doubt becomes a challenge at any stage in your career, but younger professionals, especially women, fight it most often. Impostor syndrome disproportionately impacts women. During Women's History Month, a month dedicated to honoring and supporting women, it's essential to raise awareness and offer support to those facing this challenge.

According to Forbes, impostor syndrome is a psychological pattern in which individuals consider themselves a fraud and feel unworthy to occupy a space or fill a role, regardless of the fact that their education skills and experience prove the opposite. Someone suffering from impostor syndrome will often ask themselves if they are good enough and question their abilities.

Older generations dismiss imposter syndrome, brushing it off as a figment of your imagination and suggesting that striving for improvement is the ultimate solution. Other individuals might offer well-meaning tips on dealing with the feelings of being an impostor, but they never feel sincere in their advice.



Ultimately, impostor syndrome is rooted in a society where we constantly compare ourselves to those around us without considering how unique perspectives and backgrounds can actually be advantages rather than competition. It does not help when there is constant pressure from outside sources including workplace culture, discrimination, lack of support and many other factors that can contribute to the "I am not good enough" feeling. All these different influences reinforce the little voice in our mind rather than acknowledge the need to create a more inclusive and supportive environment where everyone can feel they belong, and their place is valued.

So, what does one do to "cure" impostor syndrome and is there even "cure" to be found?

Impostor syndrome is not just going away because you suddenly tell it to. But in the words of Taylor Swift, "We all got crowns." Embracing these crowns, owning our experience and backgrounds can help battle that annoying voice in your mind telling you that you are not enough. Recognize that you deserve to be here, and your unique expertise has led to your place on this project or at that table.

Acknowledging and embracing impostor syndrome is important because it recognizes professional growth and development in one's career. As you work up the career ladder and are included in more important meetings and projects, feelings of impostor syndrome can continue to resurface. But guess what? That discomfort with impostor syndrome and feeling out of depth helps you learn and growth. Each encounter with impostor syndrome presents an opportunity for growth, and it strengthens your confidence along the way.

In the end, it is important for all professionals to recognize that feelings of fraudulence or being out of their depth are common experiences shared by nearly everyone, regardless of their level of expertise. Shifting the mindset from "I am not good enough" to understanding that others are also learning is a part of the "cure" that can be found for battling impostor syndrome. Fostering a mindset of empowerment and embracing others will result in a better setting for everyone. So, acknowledge those who may be struggling and offering support to those grappling with impostor syndrome. This is particularly pertinent during Women's History Month, a time to celebrate the resilience of women facing such challenges.

For those of you battling impostor syndrome, just know that you are seen, you are heard, and you are important. Take your crown and wear it with pride!

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Learn About Our Breakroom

Weber Gallagher is among The Legal Intelligencer’s finalists for the 2024 Pennsylvania Legal Award for its outstanding Diversity Initiative, specifically focusing on The Breakroom. The nomination highlights the firm's ongoing efforts to champion diversity and promote a culture of inclusivity within the legal profession. As one of the finalists in this prestigious category,

Weber Gallagher stands as a beacon of excellence, setting a commendable example for its peers in the industry. The winners will be announced on May 15, 2024, at the Loews Philadelphia Hotel. This event promises to be a celebration of the remarkable achievements and contributions of Pennsylvania's legal luminaries.



Let’s Talk!

Don’t miss out on the opportunity to learn more about the AWARD-WINNING Breakroom, where we get together to discuss any and all topics, from sports, to current events, to celebrity gossip, and everything in between (but not work!).

All viewpoints are welcome, and we encourage friendly, spirited debates on topics where your co-workers may have differing opinions. There’s no pressure to participate—you can join just to listen and feel free to share if you’d like!

Check out this short video clip from Paul Fires, sharing his thoughts on the Breakroom, which may change your mind! Be on the lookout for interviews with other WG employees, sharing their thoughts and experiences with the Breakroom.

