



Developing Diversity and Inclusion as Core Values

By Elizabeth A. Campbell

On Nov. 13, 2008, Houston lawyer Bob Jewell, managing partner of Andrews Kurth, L.L.P., received a CEO Diversity Leadership Award from Diversity Best Practices in Washington, D.C. The award recognized the leadership Andrews Kurth has demonstrated in advancing its diversity and inclusion strategy. The firm was one of eight recipients of the award.

From my perspective, the award validates the position Andrews Kurth has taken from the beginning of my tenure: diversity and inclusion form a long-term business strategy, not a short-term priority, not a stand-alone initiative, and not a check-the-box program.

On the surface, while it may sound impressive to label something a “priority,” making something a priority indicates only that it is important *right now*. Priorities shift and are subject to uncontrollable — and unforeseeable — circumstances. Thus, if someone were to tell me that diversity is a priority for his or her organization, I would be prompted to ask: “For how long?” Today’s priorities may become tomorrow’s back-burner projects depending on those pesky changed circumstances.

In contrast, having something as a core value indicates the intent that it remain part of the essence of the organization and the way it does business. Accordingly, many organizations have safety or integrity or ethics as *values*. These elements go to the heart of how these companies conduct their business and carry out their mission — *always*. Dare I say that not one of these organizations would permit safety or integrity or ethics to suffer the uncertainty of being merely a “priority.” If the organizations are in business, fulfilling their mission, then these values are in play — *always*.

Diversity and inclusion should be treated the same way if the organization is truly committed. I do not mean to discredit well-intentioned organizations that have diversity and inclusion as priorities. However, those organizations likely are at a

different point on the diversity and inclusion journey than an organization that maintains diversity and inclusion as core values. Let me share a little of the Andrews Kurth journey.

I joined Andrews Kurth in February 2007 as its first-ever partner/chief diversity officer. My only responsibility was to develop and implement a comprehensive diversity and inclusion strategy. As far as I could tell, no other law firm in the country had such a position. Because of what I determined to be the firm’s deep commitment to diversity and inclusion as a business strategy — not just as today’s “priority” — I eagerly moved my family from New Jersey to Houston, where the firm is headquartered.

Developing a business strategy takes time and, for its part, Andrews Kurth had already undertaken numerous diversity efforts, including the formation of a Diversity Committee; the formation of a Women’s Initiative Team; the sponsoring of biennial Executive Women’s Retreats for clients; the institution of non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies that protected applicants and employees on the basis of sexual orientation; the availability of domestic partner benefits; and the provision of financial support to many diversity-related activities and organizations in the cities where Andrews Kurth had offices. Yes, I had a lot of

substance to work from in building our diversity and inclusion strategy.

Working with a team of professionals that included a cross-section of attorneys and staff to help define “diversity” and “inclusion” and outline the key elements of our new strategy, we were able to create our business case and our vision. The strategy itself has three principal components: 1) marketing and business development; 2) human capital (which includes recruitment, retention, and professional development); and 3) procurement (supplier diversity). The strategy is firm-wide and applies to all Andrews Kurth personnel.



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After several months of work, our managing partner added the crowning touch. “Diversity and inclusion are *core values* at Andrews Kurth,” Jewell said. “We believe that valuing diversity and inclusion enhances our ability to compete for clients and talent.”

In those two sentences, we made it clear that we would move beyond having diversity as a priority to a more diversity-mature state that, as one of the nation’s preeminent diversity thought leaders, Dr. R. Roosevelt Thomas, might say, embraced diversity and inclusion as core values. By the fall of 2007, we had the business-strategy structure in place and had developed the content for our customized diversity awareness training, which I subsequently delivered to more than 800 Andrews Kurth employees, attorneys, and staff at each of our offices.

Under Bob Jewell’s leadership, we also addressed the sometimes-thorny topic of accountability. In December 2007, Jewell announced that accountability measures for diversity and inclusion would be incorporated into all attorney self-evaluations. Specifically, attorneys would be asked to delineate their contributions in support of our diversity and inclusion strategy and these reports would be reviewed by the Compensation Committee (for partners) and the Associates Committee as part of the firm’s annual compensation process. We also added diversity and inclusion “matter” numbers to facilitate the recording and tracking of attorney hours devoted to diversity and inclusion activities.

The year 2008 brought the continued development of the infrastructure for our diversity and inclusion strategy, one of our most racially and ethnically diverse summer associate classes ever, and a number of other awards for our firm and its leadership, including:

- Recognition as one of the Top 50 Law Firms for Women by *Working Mother* magazine;
- Howard Ayers, the firm’s chair, receiving a Glass Ceiling Award, presented by the Texas Diversity Council;
- Partner Doris Rodriguez receiving the DiversityFirst award, also from the Texas Diversity Council;
- Partner Kathleen J. Wu being profiled in the 2008 listing of *Extraordinary Women in Texas Law*, a special publication from *Texas Lawyer*; and
- Diversity Best Practices recognizing this author with a Diversity Officer Leadership Award.

In accepting the CEO Leadership Award, Jewell highlighted one additional accomplishment of the firm in 2008 — our work with high school students in Houston. Working with the National Association for Urban Debate Leagues in Chicago, our firm took a leadership position in beginning a league in Houston. Several Andrews Kurth partners, former debaters

themselves, joined with other prominent Houston attorneys to restore debate programs to Houston public high schools in the tradition of the late Texas Congresswoman and national debate champion Barbara Jordan. This effort reflects our commitment to our communities and further supports our long-term strategy to diversify the talent pipeline.

Success can be measured in many ways, but when it comes to diversity and inclusion at Andrews Kurth, the best measure is to ascertain whether our firm is living up to its core values — with our employees, with our clients, and within our communities. From all indications, we are indeed.

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