

Spotlight On ... Marc Ladd

You have worked at other law firms. I have two questions: 1) Day to day, how does Cohen Ziffer's diversity make a difference in how you work? And 2) What practical or measurable benefit is there to clients that you've witnessed?

The diversity at Cohen Ziffer, from the attorneys to the management to the staff, is my favorite part of the firm. To me it demonstrates that we have the best possible people working for us—which is all I want. There's no "so-and-so knows so-and-so," no family connections, no establishment that may favor more of an "old-boys" network. We are the best at what we do in this field because everyone here has earned it, regardless of their origins. That feeling makes an immeasurable difference for our firm; it means having confidence that the people in the office to the left and to the right can handle any situation, can think on their feet, and can come up with the right resolution for a client. And that is the entire objective. Our clients are from more diverse backgrounds than ever before, for the same reason—merit—they want to see this same value reflected in the law firms they hire.

Equity, diversity and inclusion is top of mind for law firms of all sizes, geographies and practice mixes. But progress is slow. And Law.com, in a June 22, 2021 article, wrote: "Diversity fatigue—a cynicism or tiring of efforts around diversity, equity and inclusion—is real. It threatens the progress law firms are making around eliminating systemic racism and creating a more inclusive environment." This quote highlights racism, but we know that diversity is much broader and more inclusive than that. As a partner who is helping to build a truly diverse firm from scratch, what advice do you have for other law firm leaders who might be struggling?

You have to *truly* commit to it, and that takes work and unwavering perseverance. Firms will have the initial goal of making sure their ranks are more diverse and inclusive. Sometimes, when one or more qualified candidates choose another firm, the firm management shrugs and says "hey, we tried" or makes excuses and your commitment and program lose steam. You can't get discouraged or settle;

you have to be willing to keep pushing forward and ensure that you're creating the best possible environment for diverse members of your team. The U.S. legal community is still a small community; people talk and those efforts will pay off eventually.

And what advice do you have for clients whose teams aren't as diverse or inclusive as they'd like them to be?

At the end of the day, the less diverse your organization, the less inclusive you are. You are only hurting yourself and your company, both in terms of the creative culture and collaboration you could be fostering and your business bottom line. A corporation's legal issues are more complex than ever, and executives are interested in new ideas to solve those problems. Diverse experience, both professional *and personal*, is invaluable to the highest performing teams, and the best source to get fresh ideas for better problem-solving is from new perspectives.

You are a white male. There are times today when you are the brunt of jokes – or, worse, ridicule. How do you respond to those with attitudes that put you in such a box?

The only response is that there really is no box that I, or anyone else, fits in, and therefore, people shouldn't waste their time worrying or caring about any such comments—jokes or otherwise. Sure, I look like I am a "white male," but what many don't see is that I am half-Lebanese and was raised Lebanese both culturally and religiously. Being Lebanese is an essential part of my life. This is just a small example, but you can never reduce anyone to the lowest denominator without knowing more about them. Even then, you cannot possibly know someone's personal experiences and history without investing the time to get to know them. Investing that time is certainly something that I do and that we do at Cohen Ziffer.

Finally, what is your personal way of building trust, alignment and agreement among diverse teams inside and outside Cohen Ziffer?

You have to be willing to open up your life to co-workers and team members to find common ground – even though and especially if you may come from very diverse backgrounds and life experiences.

Whether it is a shared interest, family dynamic or fun activity, there are always points of commonality and intersection, no matter how different you may seem on the surface. Once that connection is established, the differences melt away and everyone can focus on the relationship and the work.

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