

## **Diversity & Inclusion Spotlight**

Kelli Sims, Shearman & Sterling LLP

For this issue's Diversity & Inclusion Spotlight, Kelli Sims, a member of *Energy Law Advisor's* editorial board, connected with Sandra Bang, the Chief Diversity & Talent Strategy Officer at Shearman & Sterling LLP, a New York-based, global law firm, with 24 offices and nearly 900 lawyers worldwide. Ms. Bang shared her perspectives on her role at Shearman and on the firm's diversity and inclusion efforts generally.

### **Kelli Sims (KS): How long have you been in your current role, and how did you get into it?**

**Sandra Bang:** I've been in this role for 2.5 years, and at the firm for 12. I began my legal career as a litigation associate, and I got to a point where I realized that success demanded more than just sweat equity. As a first-generation attorney, I didn't have the network, family members, or close friends who were lawyers who could provide the guidance and mentorship that I needed to excel to the next level. I noticed that attorneys were leaving practice and getting into professional development and legal recruiting in order to help lawyers become better practitioners and do their best work. I decided to do the same and to use my personal experiences as a woman of color and former practicing lawyer to support the professional development of lawyers and to advance diversity and inclusion efforts in the legal profession. That led me to where I am today.

### **KS: What do you see as the key responsibilities for a chief diversity officer?**

**Sandra Bang:** The key responsibility, as I see it, is to create a vision and strategy for what advancing diversity and inclusion should look like in an organization. In order to do that, you need to first gather information and data about the current "state" of diversity and inclusion in the organization. This could be both quantitative and qualitative data.

Demographic information can tell you, for example, who is a part of your overall organization, who are in your organization's leadership roles, and what are the recruitment, retention, and advancement trends over time. The ABA Model Diversity Form provides a template for what type of diversity data your organization may wish to consider.<sup>1</sup> To supplement the quantitative data, collecting testimonials and feedback from people in the organization about their working experiences, sense of belonging in the organization, and experiences at work as a woman, as a person of color, or another group for example. The Chief Diversity Officer can help foster a safe and open forum within which people can talk openly about what is working and not working from a diversity and inclusion perspective.

Once the data is reviewed and reflected upon, the organization can determine how it wants to advance, for example, recruitment so that it is a more diverse talent group, how to improve the retention of women and diverse people, or how to increase the representation of women and diverse people in the organization's leadership. Diversity and inclusion goals can be set. And initiatives to further educate people on topics such as bias, micro-aggressions, or mentoring can

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/racial\\_ethnic\\_diversity/ABA/updated\\_5\\_5\\_2020\\_aba\\_model\\_diversity\\_survey\\_final.pdf](https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/racial_ethnic_diversity/ABA/updated_5_5_2020_aba_model_diversity_survey_final.pdf).

help increase self-awareness and create a more inclusive work environment. A key responsibility of mine is to work with the firm's leadership and serve as a link in the chain of communication between the top and each member of the organization.

Finally, it's my responsibility to get other people involved, and part of that is making the process purpose-driven, engaging, and fun. If you can find ways to motivate people to take action and make it more enjoyable for people to do this work, then they will want to get involved.

**KS: Tell me about the changes you've seen in your role over the course of the last year?**

**Sandra Bang:** There's been a greater sense of urgency in making progress, and a huge spike in engagement on all diversity and inclusion matters. The demand for inclusive leadership and resources to educate ourselves on how to interrupt bias, address racial and social injustices, and have more empathy as we grapple with grief and uncertainty has increased. Many have turned to me as the Chief Diversity Officer for guidance and support. This role requires strong, active listening skills. It requires navigating crises within and even beyond the four walls of the organization, all the while knowing that there is nothing that will make everyone feel better instantly. But, along with that challenge, there have been so many volunteers and people eager to get involved, even if just to express justified outrage. It's important to note that while the events of this year were catalysts, progress in D&I is not always linear nor instantaneous. It takes time and thoughtful effort to implement.

**KS: What is your advice for organizations who are looking to get in this area for the first time?**

**Sandra Bang:** The first suggestion is to remember that there are resources and many people out there who want to help advance diversity and inclusion in organizations. Talk to people such as diversity and inclusion professionals, representatives from the American Bar Association, subject matter experts at places like Catalyst, or even your clients who have diversity and inclusion initiatives. People are more than happy to share best practices.

The second suggestion is to look at your own diversity data and see how it compares to other, similar law firms or companies. Is your organization in a similar position as others, or is it doing any better or worse? What does your organization want to change and achieve?

The third suggestion is to talk to the people in your organization. Get a "pulse check" on how people feel about the environment in which they work. Do they feel like they belong? Are they receiving the performance feedback and mentoring and guidance that they need in order to advance in their career? Are they seeing leaders who look like them at the firm? You can enlist the help of an outside consultant to gather testimonials and feedback on a confidential and anonymous basis.

**KS: What is your advice for individuals who feel that their organizations are not adequately addressing D&I?**

**Sandra Bang:** I would encourage them to share their thoughts with someone in the organization. It could be a supervisor, someone in Human Resources, or someone in a leadership position. Sometimes it takes courage to share constructive or negative feedback; however, the organization cannot do something to fix or change the situation unless the issue or problem is surfaced and discussed. The benefit of raising the issue or concern or even of simply questioning the situation is that some action will occur to hopefully effect positive change.