

## 3 necessary steps to become a better law firm



Emphasis must be given to opportunities that allow team members to share who they are, what work they do, and what their professional interests are – all with a focus on reflection, respect and encouragement.

SAM EDWARDS



By Apps M. Akpofure – Kegler Brown Hill + Ritter  
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It is difficult to nail down the perfect structure for a law firm for many reasons. For one, law firms can range in size from a single attorney to hundreds of lawyers and their support staff. Trying to define the perfect arrangement would raise questions of client service, fee structures, partner status, and other topics too tedious for one article. However, it is indisputable that this ideal firm would have to include a diverse team of skilled attorneys (more difficult for a solo practitioner to pull off, but do your best).

The perfect law firm would be built from a mix of attorneys with a smorgasbord of different ethnicities, identities, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds. But anyone can hire a diverse team. The true sign of success is maintaining and growing that team through purposeful career development. The following steps illustrate what it takes to be successful in diversity and inclusion efforts in order to become the best law firm (or other professional organization) possible.

### Step one – development

Professionals want to feel – want to know – that their career is going somewhere. Professional growth should be made as tangible as possible, with steps laid out as clearly as they can be. Whether “growth” refers to the path from associate to partner, the chance to manage significant client relationships, the opportunity to speak at conferences or to organizations, or simply the chance to improve basic lawyering skills, attorneys, like all professionals, must know that the possibility to make progress exists and how to access it.

This step is first because it is critical. Do not hide the path to leadership or stifle opportunities for your professionals to grow in their skills, roles, and contributions. If the future at your firm looks like a dead end, your attorneys will find better opportunities elsewhere.

### Step two – inclusion

Include your firm’s diversity efforts in:

- **Pitches.** While this isn’t a new idea, to be fully successful at this inclusion, you must go further than showing your clients that you have attorneys who are minorities. Inclusive pitch teams should not only span ethnicities, but also experiences, backgrounds, interests, and content knowledge in order to create a cultural symbiosis with clients. Not only does this level of detail show your clients that you’re paying attention, it shows your attorneys that you’re aware of and value all they have to offer.
- **Client interaction.** Bring young attorneys along when you spend time with your biggest clients so that they can meet face to face, interact, and build relationships.
- **Billing.** Make sure associates appear on bills in a meaningful way. Extend this inclusion to support staff in order to become more efficient with your tasks and provide clients with a balanced bill that is more likely to be collected.
- **Client transition.** If your up-and-coming attorneys won’t have the opportunity to assume client management responsibility when the time comes to transition clients and books of business, you won’t keep those attorneys.

### Step three – engagement

The best ways to dispel preconceptions and misjudgments are with interaction, discussion, and education. The more your attorneys and staff understand their own cultures and those of their colleagues, the more common ground will be found, the more opportunities will be created, and the stronger your workplace’s community will become.

The perfect law firm thrives because lawyers work together. So, emphasis must be given to opportunities that allow team members to share who they are, what work they do, and what their professional interests are – all with a focus on reflection, respect, and encouragement.

Engage your firm with culturally sensitive programming that educates them on the history and traditions of each other’s cultures. This shows that you celebrate the diversity you have, and that you are interested in building strong intercultural bonds within the firm.

Of course a “perfect” law firm doesn’t exist. But if it did, it would have a smorgasbord of diversity, and it wouldn’t use diversity and inclusion as frosting on the cake – it would be the cake. We should all strive to be the perfect law firm, where there is no difference in priority between the value placed on diversity and the efforts put into professional development, inclusion, and engagement.

Learn more about [diversity and inclusion efforts](#) at Kegler Brown Hill + Ritter.

*Apps Akpofure serves as co-chair of Kegler Brown’s diversity and inclusion committee, which seeks to create an environment that reflects the diversity of culture, thought, and background of our communities. In his practice, Akpofure focuses in the areas of corporate law, emerging business, and real estate.*