

# HOW ARMSTRONG TEASDALE IS MAKING DEI PART OF ITS DNA

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Since starting the diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) department in 2020, we have implemented a new policy that recognises 25 billable hours spent on DEI efforts per year. This is a critical step to recognising the importance of DEI efforts as part of our overall business model and strategic goals.

## CREATING A SHARED SPACE THROUGH EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS

We are focused on embedding inclusion and belonging throughout the firm by continuing to support existing and creating new employee resource groups (ERGs). We believe that our ERGs play a key role in building a shared space for all employees to advocate and ally for each other. We currently have four ERGs:

- the Parental Resource Group;
- the Diverse Professionals Group;
- the Women's Inclusion Network; and
- the Veterans and Military Service Group.

To further support our ERGs, we developed a leadership training programme for the chairs of these groups and instituted programming that further operationalised DEI practices across each ERG. These groups are great forums to share and discuss the equitable benefits we offer, as well as ensure the effectiveness of our non-discrimination policies.

Our ERGs in particular serve as great forums for authentic discussion and serve as safe spaces to have conversations about what is working, and what may not be. This opportunity for active listening allows us to ensure that our policies are aligned across the board and make any adjustments as needed.

## BUILDING A COMMUNITY

Our commitment to creating a deep sense of community remains at the core of our focus. Looking ahead, we have launched an internal campaign called "We are AT" to encourage belonging, foster interpersonal connection and ensure that every employee can see themselves reflected in the fabric of our

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organisation.

Given our firm's international scope, we have also made certain to have voices from across our offices involved in our DEI efforts and on our inclusion committee so that we can appropriately address and be supportive of various cultures across all firm offices.

We have also hosted, participated in and promoted events related to our attorneys' involvement with LGBTQ organisations and conferences, including hosting a speaker from the Matthew Shepard Foundation virtually for all firm offices in 2020. This experience helped to raise awareness and empathy among attendees.

In addition, our attorneys have shared their growing subject-matter experience with clients and the broader community. By doing so, they each have helped to raise the visibility of changes in the law and emerging matters impacting protected classes.

## **STRIVING FOR GROWTH THROUGH REGULAR TRAINING**

Our consistency over the years has provided us the opportunity to be recognised by the HRC. While we are proud of those accomplishments, we are fully invested in identifying ways to improve and challenge ourselves to amplify the mission of DEI.

We have robust training and professional development programmes that occur on an ongoing basis. One key component of that training is on allyship and implicit bias. We have started using bias interrupters on key committees within the firm and will continue to roll out programming that embeds bias interrupting tactics throughout the firm in hiring, recruiting, review and other areas.

## **OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES OF A SHIFTING WORK ENVIRONMENT**

One of the biggest current challenges is the remote or hybrid work environment. The shift in how we work is prompting us to rethink our strategies on how to build a culture of inclusion and belonging amid the rapid shift in the future of work.

In response to these challenges, we have identified specific efforts to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to actively participate in our DEI efforts. We are focused on continuing to provide DEI programming virtually and offering opportunities for small group connection with multiple points of contact, and we did this successfully in 2020 in two ways.

- We moved our annual Inclusion Week online. This is a week where we celebrate, learn and engage around DEI topics with speakers, roundtable discussions and interactive programming. We provided opportunities for individuals, small groups and large groups to come

together virtually around our theme: “Explore. Connect. Engage.”

- Our ERGs played a significant role in building community through book discussions, movie nights, mindfulness events and webinars. Open to everyone, these events were focused on providing a variety of activities so that everyone could find an activity that suited them.

Even with the challenges that firms still face, implementing practices that champion collaboration and active listening is critical. One thing that firms and leaders therein can do is take time to get to know their teams personally and understand what matters to them, what motivates them and what is most challenging for them. Because we are diverse, those needs are going to be varied across the board, but they may track to collective and creative solutions. Being informed can also drive policies and programming that will impact the greater good.

## **LEADERSHIP ACCOUNTABILITY IS KEY**

Firms seeking to create effective DEI strategies need to commit to leadership accountability, making and embedding DEI into every aspect of the firm’s culture. It is not just a series of actions you take; it has to be core to your firm and who you are.

When you look at recruiting, for example, you have to be intentional in sourcing diverse candidates using more creative efforts. The competition for talent has all but intensified given the shift to flexible work preferences. As firms look to develop their strategies, it is critical that they:

- get buy-in from leadership;
- take a close look at gaps and what will move the needle for their firm specifically; and
- then get the right people on board to champion those efforts, including stakeholders from a variety of backgrounds.

## **DEI IS IN OUR DNA**

AT’s approach to DEI is not only focused on DEI as a trend, but on shifting it to become part of our organisation’s DNA.

DEI is not just aspirational. We do not view our work in this space as a goal. Rather, we view this as a critical component of who we are as this work is one of the pillars of our strategic goals. We are focused on belonging and creating opportunities for everyone to ally and bring their authentic self to work. We know that will continue to allow AT to do great work for our clients.

The continued growth of our firm serves as a driver for the expansion of DEI programming and engagement opportunities. DEI is not only part of our strategic focus, but also inspires the ways in which we support our clients’



needs.

Last year, we started meeting with client teams to identify the best approaches to collaborate on DEI efforts. We are also examining how to more effectively partner with organisations to support our community through collaborative initiatives with the Law Firm Anti-racism Alliance, our diversity scholarship programme and service options with organisations such as the Bar Association of Metropolitan St Louis, the Urban League in St Louis and similar organisations across all of our markets.