

Haynes and Boone's 2021 Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Retreat Focuses on 'Acting With Purpose'

March 3, 2021 Taylor Wilson, Tom Chen, Brian Kwok

On Feb. 25-26, Haynes Boone virtually hosted its biennial Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Retreat, which was designed to educate and empower guests to become advocates for diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging.

Titled “Acting with Purpose,” the Retreat included presentations from industry and firm leaders, networking opportunities and suggestions for how to be an ally in advancing diversity within the firm and profession.

Here are the highlights from the 2021 Retreat:

Feb. 25:

Managing Partner [Taylor Wilson](#) kicked off the retreat, discussing how the death of George Floyd deepened the firm’s resolve to create an environment conducive to diversity and inclusion.

“We all agree that diversity makes us stronger as a firm and is an important part of our culture, our DNA, and our history.” Wilson said. “Diverse perspectives improve our work product and our ability to solve problems for our clients. We need courage and leadership to meet our diversity goals. I personally commit to leading these efforts.”

In a powerful keynote presentation, Michelle Silverthorn, founder and CEO of Inclusion Nation and author, discussed “10 Ways to be an Inclusive Leader.” She discussed assumptions, stereotypes, and unconscious biases that people may have, as well as micro-aggressions that serve to minimize and belittle others.

Silverthorn said firms must be able to talk about race and race relations. Haynes Boone must also design a workplace that removes barriers, addresses why some people are underserved or feel shut out, and create an environment that allows everyone to succeed, she said.

“Everyone deserves the chance to come into this firm and be told ‘You belong here,’” Silverthorn said. “We get there through equity – fair treatment, access, opportunity, and elimination of barriers.”

Director of DEI Jennifer Reddien and Partner [Tom Chen](#) discussed the work of the firm’s Task Force, formed in 2020 to improve the Haynes Boone’s track record on retaining minority lawyers. They highlighted the detailed investigative work performed by the committee last year to assess the DEI environment at the firm, including about 100 interviews of minority lawyers and Haynes Boone alumni, as well as firm and practice leaders. That research formed the basis of 11 recommendations by the task force that were unanimously approved by the firm’s executive committee and board of directors.

Those recommendations include implementing mandatory education and training around diversity issues; researching and identifying optimal work allocation systems for all associates to ensure opportunities are equitably distributed, enhancing integration for Black attorneys; and encouraging real-time feedback for all associates.

Discussing the impetus for the task force, Reddien noted that Haynes Boone is roughly in line with industry averages in regard to the percentage of minority attorneys at the firm. “But we are not an average law firm. We intend to be a market leader and, to do that, we need to walk the walk with DEI. Our clients are demanding it, and it will make us a better firm.”

The first day of the Retreat closed with a group discussion, during which the participants used hypothetical scenarios to discuss retention, allyship, microaggressions, and gender bias.

Feb. 26:

On the second day of the Retreat, Phil Gwoke, a generational diversity consultant with Bridgeworks, gave a keynote presentation titled “When Generations Connect.”

During this program, Gwoke addressed the communication challenges between the four different generations that currently make up the workforce: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials and Generation Z. With the goal to tap into the strengths of each generation, Gwoke discussed the specific traits of the different groups and offered suggestions for how to best connect with these generations in the workplace.

“Try to understand each other, act with purpose, and go from a conversation to meaningful change,” Gwoke said.

During a panel titled “Diversity in the Legal Profession: A Conversation with In-House Counsel,” Haynes Boone Partner [Brian Kwok](#) moderated a panel that included Gilbert Wong, Associate General Counsel at Facebook; Altresha Burchett-Williams, Assistant Vice President and Senior Legal Counsel at AT&T; and Dawn Pittman Collins, Assistant General Counsel – Product Law at Toyota Motor North America, Inc.

The panelists stressed the importance of companies and law firms being intentional when setting diversity initiatives. They agreed that action is essential to achieving these goals.

Collins noted that she has seen companies becoming more willing to delve into the issues. She said that “clients, customers and employees want more access and transparency.”

The Retreat closed with a large group discussion about retention at Haynes Boone and concrete steps that firm leadership can take to improve the experiences of diverse attorneys.