Haynes Boone Partners Monika Sanford, Albert Tan Lead Texas Bar Discussion on DEI issues

By Albert C. Tan, Monika Singh Sanford | May 9, 2023

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Haynes Boone Partners Monika Sanford, co-head of Finance, and Albert Tan, a member of the Executive Committee and Board of Directors, on April 29 participated in a State Bar of Texas (SBOT) discussion titled: Can Asian Americans Break the “Bamboo Ceiling” in Law Firms and Corporations?

Monika moderated and Albert participated in the discussion, which was sponsored by SBOT’s Asian Pacific Interest Section (APIS) and was held in connection with APIS’s 25th anniversary celebration in Austin. The panel included : Albert Li, chief legal officer, general counsel, and compliance officer at Owlet Baby Care; Charlene Tsang-Kao, assistant general counsel at Marathon Oil; and Scarlet McNellie, partner and Head of M&A North America at Norton Rose Fulbright.

The panelists covered a range of important topics, including strategies that AAPI professionals should consider to advance their careers and secure leadership roles in law firms and corporate law departments. The panel presentation was designed to introduce transparency and foster an open discussion regarding what it takes to move to the next level in one’s career. The panelists gave personal insight into their own challenges and experiences and offered specific advice to attendees.

Below is a sample of questions Monika posed to the group and the panelists’ answers:

What is the surest path to leadership roles for AAPI lawyers?

- Private practice lawyers should aim to be a top-level, profitable lawyer in their practice and pay close attention to the firm’s management structure before deciding which leadership roles best fit their strengths. They should then pursue opportunities to serve on firm committees and serve in the best interest of the committees and the firm, focusing on being self-less.
- In-house lawyers should focus more on the corporate structure (rather than committees) and decide where do they best fit into that structure.

Once they have found their path to leadership, what are some of the skills lawyers need to succeed?

- Within a law firm environment, the best thing is developing a reputation for being collaborative and for focusing on doing what is in the best interest of the firm.
- Five qualities are needed to succeed: (1) exceptional business judgment, (2) social intelligence, (3) people management and team building skills, (4) humility with substance, (5) ability to drive change.
- In-house lawyers should focus on the “expertise to communication paradigm.” Once you have the needed expertise, focus on your communication style and what is needed to produce strategic results.

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What are actions AAPI attorneys can take to improve their brand?

- Lawyers should focus both on “internal branding” —being top of mind with key leaders in your firm — and “external branding,” speaking at conferences, writing articles and doing things to get your name out in the community.
- In-house lawyers also need to continue to work on external branding, including seizing speaking and writing opportunities.

How should AAPI lawyers go about finding mentors and sponsors?

- In choosing mentors and sponsors, private practice lawyers should think about who has the type of high value practice and volume of work that one can learn from and use as a springboard to become marketable internally and externally. In picking mentors and sponsors, it also is important to select those who can provide the intangible guidance and lessons on what it takes to be successful in the business of law.

Excellence in diversity and inclusion has been a core value of Haynes Boone since its founding. The Leadership Council on Legal Diversity (LCLD) named Haynes Boone, a 2022 Top Performer and Compass Award winner in recognition of its strong commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives within the firm and the legal profession. The firm recently achieved Mansfield Rule 5.0 certification, demonstrating that that it has considered at least 30% women, underrepresented racial/ethnic groups, LGBTQ+ lawyers, and lawyers with disabilities for leadership and governance roles, equity partner promotions, formal client pitch opportunities, and senior administrative positions. The firm recently committed to pursuing the latest certification under the Mansfield Rule 6.0 process for 2022-2023.

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