



Positively Legal: How and Why to Foster a Diverse Team

Career Development



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Rachel Launders, General Counsel and Company

Secretary, Nine Entertainment

The spotlight on diversity has increased in recent years, including positive research around the importance and benefits of a diverse team and debates around whether quotas and targets are successful.

This month, I spoke with [Rachel Launders](#), general counsel and company secretary at [Nine Entertainment](#), where she leads a team of 17, about the importance of diversity in teams and how to cultivate it successfully.

What is diversity?

For Launders, a “diverse team” is “a team that brings a variety of experience to the group — that might be across areas of legal expertise, background before becoming a lawyer, other skills/hobbies, age, gender, ability/disability, or any other facet of what makes a person unique.”

What is the benefit of a diverse team?

The benefits of diversity in teams is well documented:

Improved culture

Diversity can improve the corporate culture by ensuring that people who are part of the team feel empowered, accepted, welcomed, and that their ideas matter (Laura Liswood’s book, [The Elephant and the Mouse](#)).

Financial outperformance

The business case for gender diversity on executive teams has more than doubled over the past decade. Each of McKinsey & Co’s reports (2015, 2018, [2020](#), and [2023](#)) found a steady upward trend, tracking ever greater representation of women on executive teams. According to the 2023 report, “Companies with representation of women exceeding 30 percent (and thus in the top quartile) are significantly more likely to financially outperform those with 30 percent or fewer. Similarly, companies in our top quartile for ethnic diversity show an average 27 percent financial advantage over others.”

Smarter decisions

“[Inclusive teams are 87 percent](#) more likely to make better decisions than non-inclusive ones ... because diversity triggers more careful information processing, more questions, and less blind belief in the ideas of people who pontificate.” In addition, [diverse perspectives](#) enable a more comprehensive analysis of problems and a consideration of different viewpoints. This can lead to

better-informed decisions and minimize the potential for groupthink.

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More effective problem solving

“No matter the background, ethnicity, or ages on the team. The more diverse the team, the better it is at [solving problems](#).” BetterUp agreed saying, “Different backgrounds and experiences offer alternative approaches to problem-solving, resulting in more robust and effective solutions. Diverse perspectives challenge assumptions and [encourage critical thinking](#).”

Enhanced innovation



A homogeneous team can cause groupthink and create complacency within the business. Vodolazskyi / Shutterstock.com

“Innovation comes through the [lens of diversity](#). We look at issues differently based on where we are born, how we are raised, where we come from. A diverse team will create products in a way you may miss if you have a homogeneous team.”

Better retention

“Poor retention is expensive. Some estimates put the cost of replacing lost employees at six to nine

months of that employee's salary. Retention speaks to the inclusion portion of a company's [DEI efforts](#)." BetterUp cited the Diversity and Inclusion Study conducted by Glassdoor which found that 76 percent of job seekers consider diversity an important factor when considering job offers. They suggest, that [inclusive workplaces](#) that "value diversity foster a sense of belonging and create an environment where employees feel respected and valued for their unique contributions. This inclusivity boosts employee morale, satisfaction, and engagement, ultimately increasing retention rates and reducing turnover."

Increased learning

"One of the most commonly cited [benefits of diversity](#) in the workplace is that it can increase opportunities for learning, while also enhancing everyone's capacity for innovation and creativity." This is because people with different backgrounds have different perspectives and ways of thinking and "exposure to new ideas and experiences can help broaden your entire team's capacity for creative thought. ... As team members come together toward a common goal and seek to lift and empower each other, everyone's capacity for meaningful contributions can improve even further

Decreased groupthink

"Avoiding groupthink is one of the biggest benefits of [workplace diversity](#) because a diverse team provides access to a wider range of skill sets and experiences and different ways of thinking, behaving, and communicating. This facilitates the growth of new ideas and reduces groupthink."

When asked about the benefits of a diverse legal team, Launders says, "I don't know if there's anything specific about a diverse legal team, compared to a diverse team. But some of the benefits are getting more perspectives on a problem, more empathy, being able to provide better training (as our juniors get to see different ways of working from the senior lawyers), and providing better service to our business because we're not all the same. For example, I've got a couple of people in the team who have law as their second career. I really appreciate the perspective and skills that they bring to the business from having been in other industries and non-legal roles. And that translates into providing great service to the business because they've got a different understanding of how things work, or being able to improve the way the legal team does things based on what they've seen work in other roles."

How to promote diversity and inclusion?

The BetterUp article, [What diversity really means, and why it's crucial in the workplace](#), identified the following ways to promote diversity and inclusion:

Hiring practices

Ensure diversity in your hiring and recruiting practices by making sure that you are looking at talent from all backgrounds.



When hiring candidates, be certain that you are recruiting talent from all different backgrounds and nationalities. fizkes / Shutterstock.com

Employee groups

Provide spaces where employees can gather with other people of their background, ethnicity, and/or who share certain interests as a way to make sure that people feel included and represented at work.

Inclusive leadership

Inclusive leadership boards make better decisions and are a powerful reminder to the rest of the company of the values the organization embodies.

Transparency

Be transparent about your efforts to build diversity and ask your teams for help.

Broad contribution

Ask people to contribute to a discussion, especially if they haven't spoken up before to ensure there is diversity of thought.

For Lauenders, developing or building a diverse legal team “needs to be a conscious thing and you need to be prepared to make an effort to make it work. Otherwise, you just find the person like yourself and hire them because it's comfortable.” Lauenders describes how she was recently looking for one or two paralegals: “There's no shortage of people who could do the role and who could have slotted into the team very easily. But we took a slightly different approach as part of recruiting and asked Paralympics Australia (Nine will be showing the 2024 Paralympics Games from 28 August — shameless plug) if they have any law students in their athlete ranks. So, one of our paralegals, Amy, is an Australian level goal ball player, who is part way through her law degree. Amy's got skills the rest of us don't, from navigating a world for sighted people, and we've all learnt about how to manage around the small number of things she can't do in the workplace.”

When asked if she thinks there are any challenges to growing a diverse legal team Lauenders says, “I might be optimistic but I don't think so, if you're starting with good people in your team. Like with our recent paralegal recruitment, there might be some time and effort in thinking about how a role can be done but my team have been brilliant at doing that. Generally, we've been successful at finding what each of us are good at and ways of using our special skills or diverse backgrounds to contribute to the work of the team.”

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Tips to bringing out the best in a diverse team

There are clearly benefits to hiring and cultivating a diverse legal team. When asked for tips on how to bring out the best in such a team, Lauenders suggests, “You just need to want to make it work and put in the effort to make it happen. It starts with your approach to recruiting, and then putting in the time to ensure someone who may not come with the same background or approach as yours is able to thrive. You also need to be open to doing things differently and hearing a different perspective, so respecting what each person brings to any problem or way of working. A lot of that just comes down to being open minded and respectful.”

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It is clear diversity is beneficial to teams and improves creativity, innovation, and problem solving. While gender is not the only measure of diversity, it is a significant one and, in 2022, I spoke with Lauenders about [Why are Women Still Considered to be Different Leaders than Men — and What Can They Do About It?](#). This discussion around women's leadership styles remains relevant today and is an important consideration for any team looking for diversity of thought at every level.

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Caterina Cavallaro is deputy general counsel at VGW.

She combines technical legal skills with practical business understanding and a love of innovation, project management, and legal technology to improve ways of working within the legal industry. She is a member of the ACC's In-House In-Health and Legal Technology and Innovation Special Interest

Groups.

In addition to her legal skills she has a Diploma of Positive Psychology and Wellness and is a freelance writer. Her “Positively Legal” column for the *ACC Docket* focuses on the intersection of neuroscience, positive psychology, and in-house practice by interviewing experts and fellow lawyers and curating up to date quality research, podcasts and books to help lawyers learn to take control of their own wellness and support their careers.

Outside of work, Cavallaro loves traveling, snorkeling, meditating and spending time in nature.