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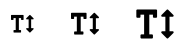
## What companies need to know about implementing DEI initiatives in the workplace

DEI initiatives can create supportive, welcoming, and thriving professional environments. Smith Anderson is on the forefront of helping clients understand how to implement these efforts in an impactful way.

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By **Alison Hill**



*This article was written for our sponsor, [Smith Anderson](#)*

The overall goal of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) efforts is the creation of a supportive, inclusive, and welcoming work culture where everyone, regardless of their differences, can succeed and thrive.



It's possible that in the early stages, some companies thought of these initiatives as primarily public relations efforts, but time has shown how the implementation of DEI in the workforce has a holistic and significant impact on organizations as a whole.

It's helpful to begin by quickly defining each part of DEI. Diversity refers to all the characteristics that make us unique in the workplace, such as background, ethnicity, nationality, gender, race, age, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic class. Equity is ensuring that no matter what the person's protected class they have an equal opportunity within the workplace to succeed. And inclusion means the practice of making sure everyone feels a sense of belonging at an organization.

Taylor Dewberry is an employment attorney for Smith Anderson in Raleigh and serves as their Chief Diversity Officer. She noted that it is not uncommon for businesses to ask the firm to consult on DEI policies, and that the requests to do so are growing over time.

"DEI is a concept that informs a lot of different HR and employment policies," said Dewberry. She added that while DEI has been around for a while, it's gained more traction in the past decade and especially since 2020. "A substantial part of DEI is about HR professionals being intentional in actively recruiting diverse candidates for openings and to make sure diverse employees feel included and have equal promotional opportunities." She added, it's also taking extra effort to think about how to retain people with diverse backgrounds and help them fully succeed at your company.

There are many ways to implement DEI efforts at an organization according to Dewberry. The first steps include focusing on recruitment and promotion. How and where a job opening is advertised matters, as well as the language that is used.

She said company leaders and HR and recruiting professionals should ask themselves, "What are we doing to fairly recruit diverse candidates? Are our policies and standards for promotion transparent? Are we making sure we have fair steps on how to succeed within the corporation?"

Dewberry also emphasized the importance of using inclusive language within the company and on job notices. The strategy should also include having diverse employees conducting interviews, so job candidates are evaluated by a diverse panel of employees and perspectives.

"The human element is the key part of HR," Dewberry reminds us. "A company can have all of the policies and strategies they want but how it's implemented in practice is what matters."

While DEI efforts are encouraged across the board, employment law can be very nuanced. Dewberry said it's smart for businesses to consult with legal professionals to ensure that all practices are in accordance with state and federal laws.

"A lot of clients come to law firms and ask them to review DEI efforts to make sure that they're promoting diversity while being fully compliant with existing federal employment laws," said Dewberry. And it's a question and a practice that firms are familiar with internally. "Law firms are big employers themselves and we're always thinking about ways to make sure diverse lawyers are given equal opportunities and are staffed on key matters. Clients are also demanding more and more diversity within their legal teams and challenging their firms to have actionable DEI in place," she said.

Like many organizations, Dewberry said that DEI efforts have made an impact on the expertise of legal teams because having a diverse team, with different perspectives and inputs, working on projects, can only strengthen the process and improve results. "If you have a group of people with diverse backgrounds or experiences, working on a project, it's going to add layers of positive complexity and outside-the-box thinking that a group of people with similar backgrounds and experience would not offer," said Dewberry. "I'm always excited and eager to learn about people from different backgrounds, it makes me feel like I understand something about issues that affect people outside of my own protected class. When you work with people who think differently, it challenges you and makes you grow as a person."

Companies that implement a DEI strategy can attract a broader base of new potential employees. And an employer who equally recognizes, respects, and values all its workforce on an everyday and ongoing basis, is bound to experience a boost in creativity, office morale, increased productivity and retention.

"Making sure people have fully equal opportunities creates a stable workplace. Employees will want to stay if they feel included in the company culture and mission," said Dewberry. Retaining good employees decreases turnover, eliminating the need for expensive hiring and retraining. So, DEI is mutually beneficial for both employers and their employees.

While it's her job to help both her own firm and her clients with DEI initiatives, Dewberry feels a personal connection to this mission as well.

"I want to make a world where young kids can see representatives of themselves in the jobs they want to do. When I was a young woman thinking about going to law school, I didn't see a lot of lawyers that looked like me," said Dewberry. "I hope with concerted DEI efforts will inspire others to feel fully capable in achieving anything, and that those from underrepresented groups can see themselves being a lawyer, a doctor, or whatever they want to pursue. Nothing in your background should hold you back from that experience," she added. "That's why our DEI efforts are important in all professions. The focus on putting intentional efforts behind this has lasting results."

At Smith Anderson there are many teams working on DEI, with eight attorneys sitting on the diversity committee and members of the marketing team also assisting and supporting the firm's diversity initiatives. This includes a diversity fellowship program where law students committed to DEI efforts are offered internships that will lead to a potential full-time position at the firm. "With programs like this and other recruiting strategies law firms are using, this allows us to connect earlier on with candidates from underrepresented groups that will serve us in the long term in building the different perspectives that we're looking for," said Dewberry.

"We're a big employer with a responsibility to be a good steward to the community," she said. "As part of our DEI efforts, we dive into how we can make a lasting impact in the RTP community. We realize we must better the society we are a part of."

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