

8 Ways to Become an Active Ally Right Here, Right Now For A Lawyer By A Lawyer Zenell B. Brown, Esq.

As a lawyer, you are busy. Right now many of you are Zooming in for hearings, meeting with staff through Microsoft Teams, and dreading what family responsibilities await you as the school year begins. You're managing work and life in a pandemic.

In this midst of this chaos, a hailstorm hits. It is desperate times for social justice. You can't even imagine a world where an officer blatantly puts his foot on the neck of another human being and is unmoved as his victim repeats, "I can't breathe." You realize the significance of this moment and know it is time for change. You dreamed as a lawyer you would help usher in social change.

You know women and minorities are underrepresented at the senior partnership level; you understand the impact of unconscious bias; and, you appreciate the fact that diversity and inclusion is not a zero sum game. You probably have written a check in support of Black Lives Matter or another deserving effort. You are an ally. However, there are not enough hours in the day to fit more in; your heart is in the right place and your intentions are good.

If you believe there is added value of engaging your hands and shaping the future, here are 8 simple and easy ways to become an Active Ally right here, right now.

Enhance the environment and mainstream the conversation:

1. Challenge your implicit bias by choosing screensavers that show anti-stereotypical images and purchase a desktop calendar with daily quotes and images that support diversity and inclusion.

2. Clip, save, and pass it on. Share your good books and articles. Circulate your books and articles with friends and colleagues of all identities. Welcome their thoughts and feedback. (Also, books that promote diversity and inclusion make great gifts to celebrate your associate's anniversaries with the firm.)
3. Tweet, Retweet, and Share. Social media makes sharing easy to do so. Remember, if you like it, share it. Follow local and national thought leaders on your favorite platforms, comment on their posts, and share the posts on your platforms. You may even be opening new doors for the conversation to take place. Add one line about your take-a-way or a thought provoking question and engage those who comment in conversation.
4. Buy an Ally T-shirt. No matter how busy you are, you have to wear clothes and T-shirts are a must have for every wardrobe. Type in "Diversity T-shirts" in the Amazon search bar and choose your favorite print and logo. If you find an extra minute of downtime, design your own. Depending on the design, a T-shirt can be your individual protest or celebration. Everyone loves a T-shirt and they come in all sizes, making them great gifts, and another way to easily spread awareness.

Help Diversify Your Regular stomping groups: In homogenous firms, bar associations, board rooms, and other professional and social networks:

5. Take notice and ask questions. Ask, "Where are the women, minorities, and other underrepresented groups?" If there is one woman, one black, or one Asian, ask, "Where are the others?" "What can we do to ensure underrepresented groups are included?"
6. Know your numbers. In firms and businesses, track recruitment, retention, and promotion data. In bar associations, know the demographic make-up in your geographic area and of your association. What do the numbers reflect? What

questions need to be asked and actions needed to be taken?
The numbers tell a story and provide insight.

Practice Inclusion in your Zoom and Microsoft Team meetings:

7. Go around the virtual table and invite input from all who are present. Leaders should save their thoughts for last so as not to influence discussion.
8. Ask meeting attendees, “What diverse groups are going to be negatively and positively impacted by the decisions we are making? What are the probable impacts on those groups?” This allows the group to introspect and reflect.

Some of the ideas may be cheesy or so obvious that you previously discounted them. However, every action matters. Everyone can do something to move diversity and inclusion forward, and you can start right here, right now.



Zenell Brown currently serves as the Executive Court Administrator of the Third Circuit Court. She is a certified diversity professional; co-author of a SCAO approved mediation training curriculum; and, contributing author to various local and national publications on the topics of alternative dispute resolution and diversity and inclusion.

Zenell serves on the board of the Detroit Bar Association, the board of the Michigan Diversity Council, several committees of the National Association of Court Management, the faculty of the Michigan Judicial Institute, and the faculty of the Institute of Court Management. A forever learner, Zenell holds a Juris Doctor (Wayne State University Law School), Graduate Certificate in Public Administration (Central Michigan University), and Judicial Administration Certificate (Michigan State University). Her commitment is to serve the justice by not only ensuring the system works for all, but to also equip and empower the individual attorney to move diversity and inclusion forward.

