



Committed to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion? Audit Your Personal Network to Find Out

Diversity and Inclusion



Cheat Sheet

- **Network Audit.** Take stock of the demographics your personal network represents and identify where you want to expand your network.
- **Intentions.** Set the intention of diversifying your network and enter networking opportunities with it at the forefront.
- **Effort.** Push against the instinct to gravitate towards people like you.
- **Maintenance:** Keep up the effort of diversifying your network beyond the initial introduction.

There is a great deal of discussion within in-house legal departments about supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) both within the legal department itself and throughout the company as a whole. Increasingly, legal teams are being held accountable for DEI metrics, including measures of the proportion of legal spend that goes to diverse lawyers and consultants.

When in-house counsel need a new hire or an external vendor, our first instinct is to turn to our personal networks for recommendations. While it is an easy way to get a quick pool of candidates from individuals whose opinions you may value, question whether this approach is aligned with DEI goals.

Does your network reflect individuals who share your same demographic characteristics in one or more ways? If the answer is anything but “no,” there is a low likelihood that you will be able to construct an equitable and diverse pool of candidates through the informal referral process.

On the other hand, if you set an intention to consistently build and expand rich diversity among your network and prioritize DEI in your outreach, you will be better positioned to cast a wider net to more effectively advance DEI objectives. But how do you know where you stand?

Auditing your network

Start with a quick gut check and give yourself a pre-assessment regarding how diverse you believe your network to be on a scale of 1-10 (spend a minute or less on this initial assessment).

All you need to audit your network is a scrap of paper or an Excel spreadsheet. Create four columns as follows:

| Characteristics | Same as Me | Different from Me | Don't Know |
|------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Age | | | |
| Race | | | |
| Ethnicity | | | |
| Religion | | | |
| Sex | | | |
| Sexual Orientation | | | |
| Gender Identity | | | |
| Ability/Disability | | | |
| Veteran Status | | | |
| Education Level | | | |
| First Gen College Grad | | | |
| Immigration Status | | | |
| Language Access | | | |
| Familial Status | | | |
| Socio-political view | | | |

Use this table to audit your LinkedIn network.

Open LinkedIn and look at the first 50 posts of the people who are in your LinkedIn network (not second or third degree posts). Put a check in each box for whether that person is the same as you, different from you, or you don't know for each of the traits listed above. Try the same exercise on

Facebook. You might also try this with your contacts in your text, phone, and email history.

Look at the tally. How do you feel about the results? Are you getting a lot of “same as me” across the board? Are you getting more “same as me” in certain areas? Does this back of the envelope exercise help you identify areas where you can build relationships, further diversify your network, or provide more equitable access to opportunities outside of your existing network? What surprised you the most in your network audit?

Give yourself a post-assessment on how diverse your network is on a scale of 1-10. How accurate was your pre-assessment of the diversity of your networks? If there was a difference between your pre-assessment and post-assessment score, consider what relationship building assumptions and default network settings played a role in that difference. Identify two or three areas where you have some opportunities for improvement. Write down your reflections and share them with a trusted colleague, friend, or accountability partner.

Diversifying your network

Let's be honest, we all (including the authors) have significant opportunities to improve, but how do we go about expanding our networks? Invoke the powers of invitation, introduction, and collaboration. Here are some suggestions that should be readily available:

- **Leverage your existing network:** An easy way to begin expanding your network is seeking introductions through current connections. The more introductions you make, the easier it will be to start expanding your network.
- **Go into group gatherings with intentionality:** When we go in group gatherings, we tend to migrate to people we already know or who seem similar to us. Try taking the opposite tactic. Try to meet new people who may appear to be different than you. Look up attendee lists in advance and explore background information about people who you have not yet met but share a common interest. Make a plan to introduce yourself or ask a mutual friend or the event host to introduce you.
- **Assume “host posture” in gatherings:** Many of us (in pre-COVID and hopefully post-COVID times) find ourselves in rooms where people don't know each other. This is a perfect opportunity to play the host. One can easily walk up to someone and say, “I don't know many people here and I see you standing alone. Do you mind if I join you?” If you are in a small group and notice someone standing alone, you can say, “I notice you are standing alone. Would you like to join us?” Introduce new people you meet to people you already know.
- **Join groups that represent demographics different from yourself:** There are so many organizations that represent the rich diversity of our communities. Even in the legal field there are many volunteer bar associations that represent a variety of demographic and affinity groups. Virtually all of them are open to allies, champions, and upstanders. Join in and ask how you can volunteer and be supportive.
- **Let algorithms help you:** Social media platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook reinforce your areas of interest. You can use this to your advantage. Start liking posts that come from a person that represents a different demographic than those you have followed in the past. Start following thought leaders on a new culture-related topic, or join groups specific to other demographics. You can deepen existing relationships by engaging in projects together, making offers of support on specific projects, and ask for assistance from members of your network to expand casual connections.

Organizations for expanding your network (many have local and regional chapters with rich programming):

- National Bar Association
- Corporate Counsel-Women of Color
- Disability Rights Bar Association
- Diversity Lab
- Hispanic National Bar Association
- Institute for Inclusion in the Legal Profession
- Latina Lawyers Bar Association
- Minority Corporate Counsel Association
- National Asian Pacific American Bar Association
- National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum
- National Association of Minority and Women Owned Law Firms
- National LGBT Bar Association
- National Women's Law Center
- National Native American Bar Association
- South Asian Bar Association

Next steps

Change will not happen overnight. Expanding and diversifying your network takes time; remember to be genuine and intentional in your efforts to enter more diverse spaces. You will be most effective when you commit focused attention to the effort.

For instance, can you dedicate 15 minutes a week to looking for different voices on LinkedIn to champion? Can you decide to attend two networking events a quarter that are likely to result in meeting people who are different from you? Can you target three social meetings a quarter with someone who does not share your demographic traits as a way of deepening relationships?

Embrace the power of invitation, openness, and curiosity about those you meet along the way. As with many areas of personal growth, the path forward requires consistent effort, but we have confidence that you can take the first step.

Entering Spaces as an Ally, Champion, or Sponsor

Entering new spaces and building relationships can feel awkward, especially if it's a novel concept. Be prepared to challenge yourself to get comfortable with being uncomfortable at first. Remember to focus on seeing people as individuals rather than who you assume them to be, and use your active listening skills to allow people to share who they are rather than over-sharing your own experiences.

Approach new potential acquaintances and colleagues from a perspective of wanting to learn more about them and their careers and personal story, and be sure to share your story too. Ask questions that give you an idea of their interests and experiences so that you can identify and share commonalities.

Also, explore options to engage with the organization in a way that is meaningful for both you and the organization.

For example, if an organization is looking for sponsors and you are in a position to do so, offer sponsorship or offer to support developing sponsorship relationships.

If an organization is looking for experts in a practice area for an event, suggest candidates within your network and offer to make introductions.

Many will welcome allies as active volunteers, sponsors, and champions. Always follow-up when you have made an offer of support to an initial connection.

And most importantly, if you enjoy someone's company or want to discuss ways to collaborate, suggest a virtual coffee (or an in-person coffee post-COVID). Find a joint project to do together, such as a pro bono matter, co-authoring an article, or planning an event/presentation. Keep trying to build the strength of connections.

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