APAC In-house Leaders Share How Authenticity Helps the Business

Diversity and Inclusion

Law Department Management

Skills and Professional Development

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Creating a truly inclusive and respectful workplace for in-house counsel and the LGBTQI+ community requires a multifaceted approach. Leaders from Australia and New Zealand joined a panel discussion on Authenticity in the Workplace, moderated by Cameron Loughlin, Uber's legal director for Australia and New Zealand (ANZ), and in partnership with Pride in Law.

"DEI, it's absolutely non-optional, in my opinion," said Ellie Hansson, advocacy officer for Pride in Law. "It's all about uplifting voices of those who traditionally may never have had one."

Whether societally, organizationally, or even government-wide, "you are not acting ethically if you are marginalizing people on the basis of a status that they can't control or that's fundamentally a part of them," she said. "And it's just so crucially important."

ACC Members: Watch the full program on-demand.

"Diversity has a massive link into psychosocial health and safety, which institutions in Australia now have new laws they need to comply with," said [David Brewster](#), chief legal and safety officer at Coles Group Limited. "Because if you work in a monoculture, then clearly to individuals who are the outliers in that organization, really significant — mental health, in particular — safety issues can arise.

"So for me, diversity in any form — it might be sexuality, it might be ethnicity, it might be accessibility — is critical to workplace design," he said.

"Organizations are just a microcosm of the communities of which we are a part," added [Sean Hughes](#), head of the office of general counsel for Vanguard Australia.

Hughes offered three ways that legal professionals can "step up and stand out" as allies and as leaders:

Listen first

Use your ears before you open your mouth. The most important skill here is to be comfortable in your ignorance and to acknowledge that you have a lot to learn around inclusivity.

Be accepting

If you are uncomfortable around a topic, yet still driven to be seen as doing something, you may fall short as an effective ally. Instead, consider ways to expand your own personal ability to accept all others.

Do something

Speak up, be an advocate, and — perhaps most importantly — participate. Your presence at events and in support of others will be noticed.

"I see the role of the ally, first and foremost, is to be that advocate, is to be the spokesperson, and encourage others to then feel confident to speak for themselves," Hughes said, noting that it has been incredibly powerful to see someone new to the team or organization feel comfortable talking about their partner or domestic arrangements openly.

[Shelley Mulhern](#), director of client relationships, ANZ, at Thomson Reuters, reflected on a previous company that had an unwelcoming, at times outright homophobic, environment. "It really impacts your ability to work effectively when you're not happy in an organization. And not being able to be out and authentic in the workplace really does have so many knock-on effects, both professionally and personally.

"I think when you're in it, you don't necessarily always realize it," she added. "But I think everybody

can probably relate on some level."

In contrast, Mulhern said joining Thomson Reuters felt very inclusive from the outset, with openly gay colleagues working there. "Being truthful from the outset about who I was really felt good, and talking openly about what I did on the weekends, with whom, made me form more solid relationships with my colleagues." And Mulhern's role with the Thomson Reuters Pride at Work employee network has allowed her to get more face time with leadership, to gain more confidence, and ultimately to advance in her career.

"One lesson I've learned in life is that your personal brand at work revolves a lot around how honest people think you are," Brewster shared. "When people sense that there's something that you are holding back, something that you are concealing because of that fear — and it's an understandable fear — but it does interfere in that relationship-building, which is so crucial to your career."

Hansson added that organizations shouldn't overlook the surface-level support that can help establish an inclusive culture: Use of pronouns in emails, public support of LGBTQIA+ organizations, or development a formal transition policy for employees are all examples of ways that companies make a real difference for establishing a baseline of inclusion and belonging.

For more practical tips and insights, **register and watch the on-demand program**. And check out ACC and the ACC Foundation's **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Maturity Model** for a roadmap of how to benchmark and achieve your organizational DEI goals.

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