



Guest speaker Laraine Kaminsky (at left) with Loretta Manning of Cox & Palmer.

Law firm diversity dialogue

Laraine Kaminsky never expected to have a ‘virtual assistant’ but now wouldn’t change a thing, as it works well for her hectic travel circuit as a global diversity and inclusion strategist.

“She taught me to Skype,” she told a Halifax workshop on Leveraging Generational Diversity, hosted September 10 by Cox & Palmer for clients of the firm. “I probably wouldn’t have hired her initially if I’d known she wasn’t going to move to Ottawa. But I’m hardly there either, so why would my assistant need to be there? Her work speaks for itself.”

For the first time in Canadian history, the workplace is represented by five generations of employees, a dynamic that creates greater potential for challenges – and opportunities, noted Kaminsky, President and CEO of Global LK. For example, larger accounting and financial services firms are leading the way in developing the ‘agile workforce’, building new flexibilities that benefit the employees and the business. In the trend toward fewer fixed workstations in office settings, a growing number of employees are working mainly from home, which for some can make issues of child care more manageable.

It’s a sign that employers are becoming more creative and accommodating, and it’s even happening in the relatively traditional world of law firms, said Kaminsky, who has consulted with numerous firms and the law societies in Ontario and B.C.

“If women have been leaving organizations and law firms ... why?” she asked. “Given the changes in technology and the agile workplace, why aren’t we more flexible in accommodating people who are different, and also people who are temporarily different? There needn’t be so many barriers.”

Kaminsky also led a series of workshops on unconscious bias and cultural competence, for lawyers and managerial staff at each of Cox

& Palmer’s locations in the Atlantic region.

“The firm has embraced this in a significant way. We’ve recognized it’s important to clients, to the profession and to the community,” says Loretta Manning, a partner who has led the firm’s diversity initiative.

Marla Cranston
Communications Officer

Two years ago, Cox & Palmer became the region’s first (and only) firm to join the Law Firm Diversity and Inclusion Network, a national group that encourages a culture of diversity and inclusion within firms and the broader legal profession. It’s also the region’s first business to join Pride at Work Canada. The firm established its own diversity committees regionally and in Halifax, adopted a diversity statement to express its commitment, and connected with the Society’s Equity & Access Office for advice.

The first big project was to conduct an internal diversity survey, to find out “who we are and what do we look like? What are the areas for improvement? Are we inclusive? ... The survey confirmed our initial approach for internal education, so we knew we were on the right track with the unconscious bias workshop series,” says Manning.

Cox & Palmer also reached out to other local firms with a diversity lunch & learn, and has collaborated with the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia on several events, among other things. The efforts are making a difference in recruitment, retention and strengthening client relationships, says Manning.

“Take the leap, don’t be afraid to start a diversity initiative, no matter how busy you are,” she says. “Start talking about it. There are a lot of resources out there that can help. We’ve attracted great diverse talent thanks to this initiative and we are looking forward to even more success in the future.”

