

## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

December 2017

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*Diversity can boost innovation, increase profits and employee engagement. This IADC interview with FedEx Senior VP, Connie Lewis Lensing, highlights key lessons that other leaders in corporate America and law firms can use to boost D&I initiatives within their organizations.*

## Thought Leadership: Championing Diversity and Inclusion A Conversation with Connie Lewis Lensing, Senior VP of Litigation Department at Federal Express



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Pamela W. Carter** is an AV Rated lawyer who is the founder and owner of Carter Law Group, LLC, a defense law firm in New Orleans, Louisiana. She has handled a wide-range of complex commercial litigation matters, including breach of contract and business disputes, toxic torts, and other environmental and products liability matters. She has played an integral role on several trial teams, and has litigated in both federal and state courts, arbitration hearings, private mediations, and negotiations. She also served as a news reporter for the ABC Affiliate, KATC News.

Her law practice focuses on general litigation with an emphasis on employment matters, transportation; insurance defense; toxic torts and products liability. Before starting her own law firm, Ms. Carter was a partner with the 600 lawyer firm Baker Donelson Bearman Caldwell & Berkowitz. She has represented Fortune 500 and Fortune 100 companies such as Liberty Mutual Insurance Company, General Motors, Wal-Mart, Ford Motor Company, and Chrysler. She is presently National Director with the DRI Board of Directors and is a national speaker and lecturer on many legal industry topics. She can be reached at [pcarter@carterlawgroupllc.com](mailto:pcarter@carterlawgroupllc.com).

### ABOUT THE COMMITTEE

**The Diversity and Inclusion Committee** is charged with actively increasing the involvement and participation of diverse attorneys in the organization through membership strategies and professional programming that recognizes the strength and benefits of inclusion and diversity in the practice of law. For these purposes, diverse attorneys include lawyers from groups of people who are underrepresented in the IADC's membership. Learn more about the Committee at [www.iadclaw.org](http://www.iadclaw.org). To contribute a newsletter article, contact:



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*The International Association of Defense Counsel serves a distinguished, invitation-only membership of corporate and insurance defense lawyers. The IADC dedicates itself to enhancing the development of skills, professionalism and camaraderie in the practice of law in order to serve and benefit the civil justice system, the legal profession, society and our members.*

The business case for diversity and inclusion is clear. Diversity and Inclusion (“D&I”) can boost innovation and employee engagement. Studies have found that companies and law firms with greater gender and racial diversity financially outperform their peers. <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/why-diversity-matters> Yet, progress within the legal profession has been slow in that there is still a lack of women and minorities in leadership positions. Based on a commitment to tackle D&I challenges within the profession coupled with the evidence that diversity and inclusion initiatives are more effective if they start at the top, an IADC Webinar series was launched on November 1, 2017. Our first corporate interview was with Connie Lewis Lensing, Senior VP of Legal at Federal Express.

Lensing raised a variety of reasons for corporate buy-in and caring about diversity—the most prevalent being that she believes greater diversity leads to greater diversity of thought, to the ability to attract and retain top talent, and to a better understanding of their customer base. What was made clear during the interview with Lensing is that diversity is necessary for a company to maintain the competitive edge. And Lensing said, “Diversity is an important part of our culture of equality. Our employees are telling us that they want to work for a company that cares about diversity, and it helps us recruit people whose values align to ours.”

Lensing shared that she has found Diversity & Inclusion success at Federal Express by having a group that is composed of 45% women and 40% minority. D&I success at FedEx has been the result of executive-supported employee resource groups, women’s mentoring and

leadership programs, cross-functional task forces, and equitable benefits. For example, Federal Express supports initiatives and programs that aim to support D&I within the community and to prepare women and minority lawyers for future leadership roles within the legal profession. The IADC’s Webinar interview with Lensing highlighted three key lessons that other leaders should keep in mind when trying to make their organizations more diverse and inclusive.

**Leadership:** Leading by example when it comes to diversity and inclusion. A leader’s actions, whether on or off the job, signal the extent to which diversity and inclusion are valued. Connie Lewis Lensing said, “In order to make great progress, law firm partners need to take this on as one of those key company initiatives that they’re going to personally drive.” Lensing stated that top leaders must embody the concept of leading by example and signaling how much the company cares about inclusion and diversity.

Sometimes leading by example means making tough decisions. Lensing also described deciding to hire people who bring in new perspectives over those who had similar backgrounds to others in the organization. She felt that the benefits of different backgrounds needed to be considered.

**Profitability and D&I:** What was clear from Lensing’s webinar interview was the importance of fostering diversity throughout the organization to impact the bottom line and “because it’s the right thing to do.” Lensing talked about the importance of having diverse teams at all levels of the company – from the frontlines to middle management to senior leadership. According to Lensing, her legal department has achieved positive D&I outcomes through deliberate planning, development of current talent, and outreach within the

communities that they serve. “Broaden your perspective on diversity. There’s so much work to be done across all of these issues as we push toward equality for all,” said Connie Lewis Lensing.

**Adding Diversity to Your Brand:** When it comes to diversity and inclusion, it’s not enough to simply walk the walk. According to Lensing, you need to let the world know that your organization embraces difference and welcomes all, and the best way of doing so is by making diversity and inclusion a part of your brand. Show that your enterprise cares by providing corporate-sponsored initiatives to raise funds and awareness for different causes. Invest in diversity by offering internships to people from underrepresented groups. When you bring together people of varying backgrounds, cultures, and belief systems, you bring with them a range of work styles, thought processes, and perspectives. Take advantage of all of these, and you can spark creativity, improve efficiency, and bring greater value to your clients and your customers.

***A special thanks to Connie Lewis Lensing. The one-on-one Webinar session with Connie Lewis Lensing was a great window into the mind of a successful and proven leader on a very important issue.***

D&I literature and studies found in the Vault have concluded that spreading the D&I message within your organization and spotlighting inclusion efforts underscores the support and tools required to guarantee success for all. See <http://www.vault.com/law/law-firm-diversity-programs>

Further, to help your organization with D&I efforts, we’ve outlined guidelines for how to become more inclusive. There is no silver bullet, but these best practices are a few efforts that are recommended:

**Inclusion – It’s the Right Thing to do:** Companies should improve opportunities for all employees, including those in underrepresented groups (such as gender, race, class, age, religion, disability, education and sexual orientation.) Approach the buy-in process without any assumptions. Ask questions, listen, and seek to understand everyone’s point of view before diving in with your own agenda. This will help you effectively win support from all corners of your organization. Some people will be more committed than others, and you likely won’t win the buy-in of every individual, but with a thoughtful and well-researched approach, you can be a powerful force for change at your legal organization.

**Comprehensiveness:** One-off attempts to “fix” your company D&I issues won’t work. In fact, they’ll often do more harm than good. Effective solutions have to cover all aspects of a company — its culture, its operations and its team for the diversity journey.

**Accountability:** Change doesn’t happen unless there is accountable — by tracking results, watching progress over time and comparing against others. Implementing these values requires hard work across an entire company.

#### **Conclusion: Future IADC D&I Webinars**

The companies and individuals participating in the IADC Webinars are some of the most successful in the world and they succeed while working to create and maintain diverse workforces. What they’ve made clear is that D&I programs alone are not enough to improve diversity and inclusion in most organizations. But corporate leaders have the power to champion diversity and inclusion by leading by example, setting goals and utilizing metrics, and measuring company D&I progress.



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**DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**

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**Please join us for the upcoming IADC Diversity and Inclusion Webinars where we will interview leading individuals who have made a commitment to diversity and inclusion within their organizations.**



**Past Diversity and Inclusion Committee  
Newsletters**

Visit the Committee's newsletter archive online at [www.iadclaw.org](http://www.iadclaw.org) to read other articles published by the Committee. Prior articles include:

**NOVEMBER 2017**

Making the Case: How Diversity and Inclusion Can Improve Your Firm's Financial Outlook

Paul M. Fires and Kenneth E. Sharperson

**JUNE 2017**

Clarity on the Horizon? Another Appeals Court Grants En Banc Review of Sexual Orientation Discrimination under Title VII

Eve B. Masinter and Rachael M. Coe

**SEPTEMBER 2016**

Hively v. Ivy Tech Comty. Coll., S. Bend, 15-1720, 2016 WL 4039703 (7th Cir. July 28, 2016): Sexual Orientation Discrimination not (yet) Covered by Title VII

Eve B. Masinter and Rachael M. Coe

**JANUARY 2015**

Update on Transgender Rights in the Workplace

Eve B. Masinter, Rachael A. Jeanfreu and Rachael Coe