
Hughes Hubbard & Reed

Asian Affinity Group Leader Aims to Strengthen Inclusiveness

News & Events | Diversity

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Mei Li Zhen, head of the firm's Asian Affinity Group, has been a member of the Diversity Committee since spring 2015. Born in China and raised in Brooklyn, Zhen joined the firm as a summer associate in 2009 and as a full-time associate in the fall of 2010.

Why is diversity important to you?

Diversity is significant to me because I would not be the first-generation immigrant, Asian-American, woman litigator that I am but for a group of individuals who believed in the leadership potential of students of color who lacked opportunities. They founded a wonderful organization called Prep for Prep that develops diverse students by preparing and placing them in elite independent and boarding schools in the Northeast, educational opportunities that were unavailable (and sometimes even unimaginable) to these students. I am an alumna and beneficiary of Prep. The educational opportunities I received as a result of being in the program were pivotal in my professional and personal development.

What challenges have you faced as a diverse lawyer and how did you overcome them?

The greatest challenge I have experienced in my practice thus far is remaining professional and calm while working with opposing counsel who clearly do not respect women attorneys. Luckily, having colleagues and supervisors at the firm who listen and provide support allows me to stay calm and focused on the case rather than opposing counsel's deplorable behavior.

Why did you get involved with the Diversity Committee?

As I noted above, I am the beneficiary of a program that values and promotes the leadership potential of students of color. I joined the Diversity Committee to foster, in the Prep spirit, an environment within the firm that promotes the professional development of diverse attorneys.

What's the best way for a law firm to increase the number of diverse attorneys?

A firm needs to hire diverse attorneys and foster their professional development to keep them practicing at the firm. It sounds simple, but implementing this is difficult because it requires sustained effort to nurture diverse attorneys and to help them address and overcome challenges unique to them.

What's the most notable accomplishment for your group in the last six months?

We were able to host a seminar jointly with the other affinity groups to focus on business development for diverse attorneys of all levels. Business development is an essential skill for any attorney, but we wanted to approach it from the unique perspective of being a diverse attorney.

What are the short-term and long-term goals for the group?

We aim ultimately to increase the firm community's understanding of the challenges and experiences of our Asian-American attorneys and to contribute to the hiring and retention of diverse attorneys. In the short term, we aim to provide a safe space for Asian-American attorneys for discussion and to be a voice for these attorneys' concerns.