Love Will Find a Way

Throughout my life, I have been engaged in discussion and sometimes heated debate about the subject of diversity. When I was growing up, the subject was often discussed around the dinner table where all important topics of the day were given their voice (sometimes loudly) by my Mundorff clan. Back in those days, we didn’t use the term “diversity.” Rather, the discussion centered around concepts of fairness, respect, equality and the need to eradicate prejudice and discrimination in thought and deed and to end segregation. At some point between childhood and adulthood, my Type A personality became ever-present and I became increasingly frustrated by the discussion and the debate on the subject. I simply wanted to end all prejudicial thought so that we could all live in a society that had at its core a culture of fairness, respect and equality for all people. I remember coming home from school on many an occasion, having witnessed an injustice, so frustrated that with tears in my eyes I would ask my mother, “Why can’t people just understand that they need to do the right thing?” My mother, much more patient and wise than I, upon hearing my repeated exclamations, would always say, “Gretchen, people are people and love will find a way.” Thus began my passionate quest to find a way.

As I have traveled around Pennsylvania as PBA president, I have often been asked why diversity is so important to me and why I have made it a presidential initiative. People have said, “We aren’t diverse. We don’t have diversity in Pennsylvania.” I use the term diversity in its broadest sense to encompass not only gender, racial, ethnic and religious diversity but also factors such as age, sexual orientation, disability, level of practice experience, geographic practice location, practice type and practice setting. I can assure you that we live in a state with great diversity. And if you happen to be from an area that you do not think is all that diverse, wait another 10 years. The demographics of our state and our nation are changing. We, as Pennsylvania lawyers, need to embrace the change and embrace diversity.

What are we really talking about when we talk about diversity, when we talk about creating a bar association that is diverse in its membership and leadership so that it mirrors or reflects the population of our Pennsylvania lawyers and citizenry? We are really talking about changing attitudes, changing minds and creating a culture of inclusion. Creating a culture of inclusion is good for us as lawyers. It makes us better lawyers. It makes us better people. When we harness our collective diverse life experiences and skill sets as lawyers and as people, there is no limit to what we can accomplish together for our member lawyers and the public we all serve, our clients. Our differences as lawyers and as people certainly make us more interesting as a group, but they also combine to make us richer and stronger.

I have noticed that something happens among groups of people when they really get to know one another. When we really know someone, we develop a sense of kinship with that person, almost as though we are members of the same family. At the PBA, we often refer to this sense of kinship as the “PBA Family.” The theme song for my year as PBA president is “We Are Family,” and I play it at the beginning and conclusion of every PBA Board of Governors meeting. I play it to remind all of the governors that although we are a diverse body with many differences, we have developed a sense of...
is a painfully slow process. Sometimes I feel as though we are moving at the pace of a three-toed sloth. But we are moving. We have miles to go and much to do as an association before we can or will rest.

There is a membership component to the diversity issue. Simply put, we need people to join us and become our members to be included in our bar association and to become our bar leaders. We need to hear everyone’s voice around our table. During the PBA’s “Celebrate the Constitution” month last September, I was speaking at Pittsburgh’s Manchester Academic Charter School and I was introduced as the president of the Pennsylvania Bar Association. It occurred to me that the students might not understand what the PBA is or does, so I began my talk with the students by asking them if anybody knew anything about the PBA. A second-grade boy’s hand shot up immediately and when I called on him, he said, “The Pennsylvania Bar Association is the home for all Pennsylvania lawyers!”

Realizing that while participating in a civics education initiative, I had just been mentored on the subject of diversity by a second-grader, I said, “You are absolutely correct, young man. The Pennsylvania Bar Association is the home for all Pennsylvania lawyers.”

As president of the home for all Pennsylvania lawyers, I say to all of you, welcome home! If you join us and work with us, you will connect with us and you will succeed with us. Together we can accomplish great things, and love will find a way. ✨

Gretchen A. Mundorf
PBA President

PS: At its Nov. 17 meeting in Harrisburg, the PBA Board of Governors unanimously approved the retention of a diversity officer and the creation of a PBA diversity team to promote and improve diversity throughout the state’s legal profession.