Seeking Diversity and Inclusivity

By Barry M. Simpson, Esq.

In my mud room at home I have a framed poster titled “All I really need to know I learned in kindergarten.” The poster features a bright red apple at the top and the rest is all text listing these learned life lessons, some of which are: “Share everything. Play fair. Clean up your own mess. Wash your hands before you eat. Flush. Live a balanced life. When you go out in the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands and stick together.” These observations and the resulting poster are from a book of the same title authored by Robert Fulghum in 1986.

Days, weeks and even months go by without me giving the poster a second thought, but the other day I took a minute to re-read it and think about those lessons and how at least two of them apply to the PBA: “Share everything” and “hold hands and stick together.”

At the PBA over the last two years, we have strongly emphasized what we all call “diversity.” While some may take issue with my views on this, it is my sense that we have for many years been very sensitive to diversity issues, and that has been reflected in, among other things, presidential appointments to the PBA’s strong and continuing support, both financial and otherwise, of the Minority Bar Committee and its objectives and activities. But we could do more, we can do more and, with your help, we will do more.

At the recommendation of the Diversity Task Force created last year and with the approval of the PBA Board of Governors, we have formed a permanent Diversity Team, comprised of designated section and committee members, presidential appointees and our at-large minority and women governors and unit county governor. The team is to meet at least quarterly and interact with the board, senior staff, committees, sections and the PBA diversity coordinator, a newly created and funded position. Loosely defined, the coordinator’s role is to facilitate keeping and encouraging diversity in the forefront of all the PBA does and, where both possible and appropriate, in the forefront of the legal community. For several years we have also had in place the PBA Leadership Recruitment and Development Committee, chaired by Norma L. Shapiro, a senior judge of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. That committee is charged with identifying our potential future PBA leaders, providing them with information on the process of becoming leaders and encouraging them to seek leadership positions.

So, much is happening in the process of embracing and promoting diversity within the PBA.

But Robert Fulghum’s kindergarten lessons got me to thinking about our “diversity” efforts. “Share everything” and “hold hands and stick together.” Isn’t that sense of inclusion what we strive for in our diversity initiatives? When we speak of diversity, we want to recognize, honor and respect those things that make us all different from each other. And we are all different. So it is not accurate when some of our members in some counties observe that they have no diversity within their counties, for we are all diverse, however defined. As an organization, we want to make all lawyers, members or not, feel welcomed and included under the big tent of the PBA. We should, and do, want to share everything. We want to hold hands — well, you know what I mean — and we want to stick together.

And it’s a two-way street. As we extend our hands, non-member lawyers must reach out with their hands, joining together with PBA members to share all that they can offer. Let’s face it. While we are always talking about getting people in the pipeline to leadership, we cannot do that until we first get them in the pool. Only then can we stick together.

So I suggest that as we think about, embrace and promote diversity from an organizational standpoint, what we are really talking about and striving for is inclusivity.

The PBA must always strive to make all members of the bar feel welcome, and we must provide a sense of inclusion for all. We must give all lawyers the opportunity to share their talents and perspectives, hold hands and work together. For a better PBA. And for a better legal community.

We’re working on it.

Barry M. Simpson, Esq.
Executive Director