Leading by example

BakerHostetler
Diversity, which in its early days focused on fairness, has always been more than that at BakerHostetler.

Our goal has been to bring into the legal profession as many people from diverse backgrounds as possible and make sure they have every opportunity to succeed. The more perspectives brought to a situation, the greater the outcome.

It is about real inclusion. We have long understood the power of tapping into the multiple perspectives of people from multiple backgrounds, and we have seen how it contributes to the overall success of the firm.

We work to make sure diverse attorneys have the same opportunities as their peers – to do meaningful work, to advance on individual merit, to take leadership positions in the firm.

For BakerHostetler, diverse voices produce stronger outcomes for our clients and for us.
“Diversity inspires innovation and creativity and leads to better decision-making. It is imperative that we work to ensure that the make-up of our firm mirrors that of our clients and the world around us.”

As a law firm, we strive to provide the highest quality service to our clients. That is core to our business. Improving our diversity and inclusion as a firm is essential to achieving that goal. The more diverse we become, the stronger we are as a law firm and the better positioned we will be to provide thorough, nuanced and effective counsel to our clients.

Our firm’s culture embraces people of different backgrounds and different viewpoints, and we are invested in their success. The firm is built on the personal and professional achievements of each and every attorney. It is foundational to who we are as a firm.

Our attorneys themselves know us best and know what we are doing to ensure equal access and opportunity for all. We invite you to hear their stories, to see firsthand how, as individuals and a law firm, BakerHostetler lives diversity and inclusion each and every day.

Our efforts in diversity and inclusion are important to our success as a law firm and important to me personally. As these stories illustrate, we have a lot of opportunity ahead of us.

Paul M. Schmidt
Chairman, BakerHostetler
Half of our new hires have been women or minorities since 1999

We have awarded more than $2.7 million in scholarships and clerkships to minority law students in the last 21 years

Paul D. White Scholarship Program
In tribute to Paul D. White, the firm’s first minority partner and a pioneer for minorities in the legal profession, a scholarship was created to provide minority law students with valuable experience early in their careers. The Paul D. White Scholarship is awarded annually to law students of Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Asian, American Indian, or Alaska Native descent. The scholarship includes a paid summer clerkship and a $7,500 cash award.

Diversity Fellowship Program
BakerHostetler actively recruits candidates with diverse backgrounds and perspectives to foster an inclusive workplace. As part of this long-standing commitment to attracting top candidates with diverse backgrounds, the firm established a Diversity Fellowship Program in 2009, which provides up to a $25,000 award.

Women’s Committee
BakerHostetler is a strong advocate for women attorneys and our firmwide Women’s Committee serves as a leader across the firm and in the community.

Women attorneys participate in every level of firm management. A quarter of the firm’s Policy Committee are women and our fastest-growing office is led by a female managing partner. Women serve as practice groups chairs, practice and industry team leaders, business development leaders, hiring partners and pro bono leaders. The firm has also been recognized by Working Mother magazine as one of the 2018 “Best Law Firms for Women.”

We are keenly aware of the need for innovation in advancing and promoting women in the legal profession. The firm engaged Debbie Epstein Henry, a recognized expert and best-selling author on careers, workplaces, women and law, to facilitate a four-part women in law series for male and female attorneys.

The firm recognizes the unique challenges presented in having and raising families while practicing law. We offer a customized new parent outreach program, which includes cross-office mentors and a new pilot personal coaching program with Lauren Smith Brody, author of The Fifth Trimester: The Working Mom’s Guide to Style, Sanity, and Success After Baby.

Finally, our local women’s committees continue their strong tradition of active community engagement. Events such as a FEED Supper with Lauren Bush Lauren, and an Evening with Tina Brown, help our women attorneys build client relationships, as well as engage and lead on issues benefitting the legal profession and the communities in which they live and work.
It’s not a surprise that when attorneys come to BakerHostetler, they’re here to stay. The firm makes good on its promise to preserve a collegial atmosphere while providing the kind of challenging work that promotes individual growth. The variety of perspectives and experiences that make up our team is what makes us effective counsel."
The chance to lead, right from the start

Ron Okada
Partner-in-Charge, Chicago Office, Professional Development Partner, Firm Wide Hiring Partner and Diversity and Inclusion Committee Chair

Ron Okada didn’t see himself in a leadership role when he started with BakerHostetler as a summer associate in 1984. He was simply excited by the opportunity to build strong relationships both within and outside the firm while working on sophisticated, challenging work full time. But several partners recognized his potential and welcomed his eagerness to jump in with both feet. Many of the matters he handled early on were for leading clients. Every project was important, giving Ron the chance to demonstrate his skill as a litigator.

It wasn’t long before Paul Eyre, Cleveland office litigation coordinator at the time, and Cleveland office Managing Partner Ken Snyder encouraged Ron to become involved with firm management. As Paul’s assistant coordinator, Ron interacted with the other practice leaders, increasing his visibility firm wide as a talented leader. As a result, Ron was given the opportunity to serve as the Cleveland office litigation coordinator and as a member of the Policy Committee.

Ron remained on firm management’s radar and gladly accepted the offer to open the Chicago office in 2009. As Partner-in-Charge, Ron has been able to draw on his deep roots with the firm to successfully grow the office in the new market. Looking back, he realizes now that the gut feeling he had as a young associate that he would be challenged but comfortable at BakerHostetler was telling him more than he ever could have anticipated as an attorney just starting out.

Now as Professional Development Partner, Firm Wide Hiring Partner and Diversity and Inclusion Committee Chair, Ron works hard to identify great potential leaders at the next level. He’s proud to be formally charged with maintaining the firm’s culture of support but knows firsthand that the best mentoring is often informal. The attorneys here were willing to show him the ropes and help him develop professionally. It’s why he never left—and never looked back.
“I’ve had some great mentors in my career and a lot of help along the way. They were people who had nothing to gain other than that they thought it was important to help me. That’s what leaders do when it comes to diversity. Every one of us needs to look back at our own career and take stock of those instances when somebody helped us and took an interest in us and cared about our success.”
At the table and being heard

Eric Barnum
Employment Litigation Partner

Having spent his entire career immersed in law firm diversity programs, Eric Barnum knows better than most what works and what doesn’t. As a lateral addition to BakerHostetler’s Employment and Labor Group, Eric brings to the subject a wide range of insights and experiences—which he fully intends to apply.

Eric is keenly aware of the need to mentor and sponsor talented attorneys at every stage of their career. “You can pay people to work for you, but you can’t pay them to care,” he says. “You have to show them that they are valued, supported and helped at every step up the ladder.” By doing so, a firm can make diversity work for everybody, with attorneys of every background ascending to the highest levels, making powerful contributions to the firm’s overall success.

To Eric, there is a clear distinction between diversity and inclusion. Whereas diversity, as practiced five or 10 years ago, had the admirable goal of making lawyers out of people from a wide range of backgrounds, it also tended to fit those lawyers into a common mold of conformity. This, Eric feels, did both the lawyers and their firms a disservice, offering their clients a narrow range of perspectives that are not good enough in today’s competitive environment.

Inclusion, by contrast, is about reshaping firm culture around the idea that every lawyer succeeds in his or her own way, with unique strengths, capabilities and perspectives that, taken together, serve clients in far more dynamic ways. This sort of cultural shift requires buy-in at every level of firm management, as well as across all offices. Without true inclusion, the long-term retention of those diverse attorneys becomes difficult, if not impossible.

With that in mind, Eric has recognized in BakerHostetler the sort of firm-wide commitment he sees as essential to success in today’s business climate. To someone who has seen plenty of diversity committees that were mere window dressing, he finds this firm’s positive cultural mindset most refreshing.
Seeing diversity as a key to business development

Lisa Collins
Intellectual Property Partner

As someone who has seen more than her share of diversity “window dressing,” Lisa Collins is gratified to see clients in many industries starting to insist on enforcing their diversity guidelines for staffing of matters. A successful intellectual property lawyer who came to us in 2014, Lisa has seen different diversity programs and knows what is important to her. We are happy to say that Lisa gives BakerHostetler good marks, both for setting the right goals and for making honest efforts to achieve them. As the link between diversity and business development grows more and more explicit, Lisa credits the firm with understanding that diverse teams are inevitably a win for everyone—for recruiting, for our attorneys, our clients and our own bottom line.

From her work with various diversity committees and affinity groups—both inside and outside the firm—Lisa has developed a good feel for what makes a program meaningful. Beyond pipeline initiatives and mentoring efforts, she sees the retention of attorneys, regardless of their diversity, as a key issue for any law firm—and has definite ideas about how to achieve it. People, she says, need to feel valued by their firm, paid fairly and treated equally. They need to feel that they will be assigned meaningful work, taught marketable skills and shown that their career aspirations are truly achievable. Otherwise, they will simply move on.

Sponsorship is a key factor in stemming this attrition. While all young lawyers need a champion—someone who can actively advocate for them when they are not in the room—Lisa understands that these sponsorships must develop organically from existing work relationships rather than from arbitrary assignments. Having been both the recipient and the provider of such rewarding sponsorships, Lisa knows firsthand what works and what doesn’t. BakerHostetler is indeed lucky to be able to tap such a rich vein of diversity perspectives.
"Clients understand that a legal team with broad perspectives and different experiences leads to better representation. One way clients affect diversity and inclusion on their legal teams is to demand it at the outset. Clients see the bills. They see who works on the matters. If you bring diverse attorneys to the pitch but those attorneys ultimately do not work on the matter, that bait and switch is not appreciated. At a certain point, clients will just stop using you."
“The innovative and interesting thing about Baker Hostetler was not so much its stated commitment to pro bono—after all most if not all law firms say they do as much—rather, it is how the firm expressed that commitment, by allowing me the autonomy to answer my personal call to public service in a way that has redounded to both my own and the firm’s benefit a hundredfold.”
In the early days of the New York office, attorney number 12 and one of its first associates, Fernando A. Bohorquez Jr., had a conversation with an employee from Document Services at the office holiday party that Fernando would not soon forget. The man had come to this country from El Salvador with his wife, his son and little else. And in Fernando—a first-generation Colombian immigrant—he found someone to whom he could relate and he said:

“I’m proud of you. To see a Latino like you, on the other side, we are all proud of you. I am going to bring my son to the office and introduce him to you and say, ‘Look at this young man. He looks like you. His skin is brown like yours. He speaks English and horrible Spanish—just like you. He is the son of immigrants, just like you. And he’s a lawyer. You see son, you too can be a lawyer one day, too.’”

Much of Fernando’s legal career has been shaped by that moment. It instilled within him a deep sense of responsibility to give back—to the community in general and to aspiring minority attorneys in particular. The firm’s commitment to diversity, mentorship, pro bono and community service mirrors Fernando’s own and has supported him in every endeavor. While consistently working on some of the largest litigations in the New York office in the last 12 years, Fernando has risen through the associate ranks to become a leader—both within and outside the firm.

Today, Fernando—now a partner—is Litigation Coordinator for the New York office after having served as co-chair of the New York office’s Community Outreach Initiative, a plan to align the firm’s diversity, pro bono and corporate nonprofit partnerships with its overall business development strategy. Fernando has served on numerous boards, donating his time and energy to multiple nonprofits, whether helping to build a better pipeline for aspiring Latino law students (LatinoJustice PRLDEF), or helping to develop the next generation of young urban civic leaders (Council of Urban Professionals, CUP). He has served as the chair of the NYSBA Committee on Civil Rights and chair of the American Constitution Society NY chapter; mentored dozens of high school, college and law school aspiring lawyers; and been recognized as a CUP Catalyst for Change in Law and Top Under 40 by the Hispanic National Bar Association. His pro bono work ranges from advocating on behalf of immigrants in removal proceedings to representing the NYC public advocate in the stop-and-frisk litigation to organizing hundreds of minority attorneys and law students in national Latino voter protection efforts.

Recognizing this commitment to public service, the Mayor of New York City appointed Fernando to the Conflicts of Interest Board of the City of New York, which oversees the ethics laws applicable to all New York City public officials.

In Fernando, the call to public service is an unusually strong one and BakerHostetler has supported him from day one.
A new brand of leadership

Lauren Resnick
Firm Wide Business Development Partner, Policy Committee Member and New York Office Administrative Partner

While Lauren Resnick prides herself as a high-stakes trial lawyer and trusted advisor to C-suite executives on sensitive investigative matters, it is her role in firm management that has especially distinguished her career at BakerHostetler. As one of a growing number of women who have risen to upper management positions in major law firms, Lauren enjoys being a role model and mentor to young women coming up through the ranks. What these young lawyers see in Lauren is a successful woman—with three kids—who has achieved the kind of work-life perspective to which they aspire, at a firm that encourages such balance at every stage of their careers.

Lauren views BakerHostetler as a true meritocracy that welcomes the fresh perspective and judgment she brings to the table. Even with no previous experience in business administration, she knew she was working for a firm that recognized her talents and was prepared to nurture them. Having joined the New York team nearly 14 years ago after a decade as a federal criminal prosecutor, Lauren understood that she was in an excellent position to affect the trajectory of this expanding, entrepreneurial office. With the encouragement of senior managers across the firm, she proceeded to do exactly that.

Now, as a member of the Policy Committee, the New York office’s Administrative Partner and the firm wide Business Development Partner, Lauren is a major contributor to BakerHostetler’s strategic direction. She is also a member of the firm wide Women’s Committee and the New York office Hiring Committee, which puts her in an ideal position to advance the next generation of talented and diverse leadership at the firm. But her love of the law remains a priority, as she continues to maintain a thriving white collar and government investigations practice.
“The visibility of women in leadership roles at the firm adds distinction to our culture. It’s a tangible demonstration that we are all part of a team where collaboration is valued. The only way to stay fresh is to stay engaged. The firm motivates its lawyers to make professional decisions that boost confidence and realize success. That has a huge impact on the way our attorneys, especially women, present themselves to clients and ultimately represent the firm.”
Setting an example, one mountain at a time

Joe Chairez
Litigation Partner

When Joe Chairez makes an example of himself, he makes sure it’s a memorable one. Four years ago, he made a 10-day trek to the top of Africa’s Mount Kilimanjaro to raise money for the El Viento Foundation, an organization that reflects his commitment to providing opportunities for young adults in underserved communities. At 19,341 feet in the air, it was a powerful expression of what it means to achieve your goals.

As a lawyer, Joe feels a special responsibility to help young adults become active and responsible citizens. Through “Teenage Legal Survival Skills,” a program he initiated in 2007, when he served as the first Hispanic president of the Orange County Bar Association, he’s encouraged more than 10,000 teens to think about how the law will affect their daily lives as adults. He’s a credible resource, and BakerHostetler has given him a strong platform on which to stand. In 2016 he took the banner for the Teenage Legal Survival Skills Program to Base Camp Everest.

Joe’s service to our community includes serving as a former Governor of the State bar of California, a past Co-Chair of the California Commission on Access to Justice and currently as a member of the Board of the California Supreme Court Historical Society.

A top 50 Orange County Super Lawyer and leader for the Costa Mesa office’s hard-hitting litigation team, Joe inspires young adults not only to set goals, but also to set them high.
"Talking about the law gives you credibility. You can leverage that power to do good in the community. When you take an immigrant from Mexico who’s made it and put him in a school in an underserved community, those kids, who have probably never met a lawyer before, look at you and think ‘If he can achieve his dreams, I can too.’"
In her native India, where a woman still faces significant barriers to becoming a lawyer, Monica Verma was still in high school when she set her sights on the legal profession. Both in India and later when she came to the U.S., she was told that being a lawyer would not be the right path—that being Indian, as well as a woman would no doubt hold her back.

While she is quick to point out that these warnings were well-meaning—intended to protect her from disappointment—Monica was having none of it. She has never been deterred by barriers, which she prefers to think of as challenges to which she can rise. She has always looked at her differences not as impediments, but as opportunities.

This makes her an excellent fit with BakerHostetler. She feels that the firm truly walks the walk when it comes to diversity. To her, this is a place where differences between people are not just acknowledged and respected, but also valued for the advantages they bring in the marketplace.

She is happy to offer herself as a prime example. In her early years, when American companies first started outsourcing business functions to India, Monica’s ability to understand the cultural differences on the other side of the table proved especially valuable in contract negotiations.

Since then, she has developed a thriving outsourcing practice of her own. Her sensitivity and respect for diverse cultures has given her a definite edge recognized by the firm in negotiating with counter-parties in China, Europe, India and elsewhere. Her ethnicity and background—her diversity, in other words—have become important assets of the firm.

To Monica, diversity at BakerHostetler comes down to three words: independence, flexibility and support. The very fact that she was able to re-direct her career towards an outsourcing practice speaks to the independence the firm encourages. She feels that attorneys have the flexibility to explore, to expand their practices in any direction that makes sense. “Just name it, come up with a plan, and that plan will get support—financially and by management. I literally have never been told no.”

Monica readily acknowledges her huge debt to a succession of mentors who have contributed to her success. She pays this debt forward by giving freely of her time—both formally and informally—to any law student, associate, or junior partner who seeks her advice and perspective. “My mentors never looked at it from their own goals or needs. They were always looking out for me.” She is happy to do the same for others.

Independence, flexibility, support. These words well describe diversity at BakerHostetler. They could just as easily describe Monica.
"When I see roadblocks I want to cross them. When I’m told by other people what my limits are, I am challenged and know I need to surpass them."
As an Asian American lawyer and self-described “citizen-soldier,” Brian Song has a unique feel for issues of diversity and inclusion. A lieutenant colonel in the United States Army Reserve, Brian has been in uniform since he was an ROTC cadet at age 17. In the Army, he saw how “working with people from different backgrounds is a strength” and how dedicated teams of such people can dramatically improve the outcome of any mission. At the same time, he saw firsthand the stereotyping of Asian Americans and felt the impact of implicit bias against him as a military officer and leader, and later as a litigator. Both sets of perspectives—the positive and the negative—have accompanied Brian throughout his legal and military careers.

In 2011, when Brian joined BakerHostetler in New York, he quickly saw that things here were different. When it came to diversity and inclusion issues, while recognizing that there was a continuing need to grow and improve, everyone at the firm seemed determined to walk the walk. But it was the firm’s attitude toward Brian’s continuing military career that truly surprised him. To the firm, Brian’s military career was a bonus. Our founder, Newton D. Baker, served as Secretary of War during World War I, and the firm’s commitment to the military—and especially to veterans—goes back that far. Brian discovered right away that BakerHostetler’s support was total and unequivocal. Now, at a time when clients are increasingly asking about their law firms’ hiring and support of veterans, Brian’s experience reflects the firm’s commitment to our nation’s military reservists and veterans.

On the topics of diversity and inclusion, Brian’s active participation in various affinity bar associations and diversity committees inside and outside the firm has given him a nuanced view of the differences between the two separate but intertwined issues. As a friend once told him, “Diversity is being invited to attend the dance. Inclusion is being asked to dance.” Accordingly, he sees inclusion as an imperative for the firm, not just to promote, retain and sponsor diverse talent, but also to enmesh that talent in our culture. While he understands that this is a slow process and that the legal industry’s record has been less than stellar, he nonetheless credits BakerHostetler with making serious strides in what he sees as the right direction.

“When I interviewed here, the thing that struck me the most was that I interviewed with a set of diverse partners. I had interviewed at dozens of Am Law 100 firms, and this was really the first place where I saw people of color in the room. This really gave me the thought that I can actually make partner here, because there are people here who look like me, and they’re already partners.”

Brian Song
Commercial Litigation Partner
Making diversity a non-issue

Joyce Ackerbaum Cox
Employment & Labor Partner

“I’ve learned a lot about diversity just from what I see going on with clients. It’s amazing, the spectrum of efforts. Some organizations have very sophisticated policies and practices—and some have none.”

As a labor and employment lawyer, Joyce Ackerbaum Cox sees firsthand both the good and the bad approaches to workplace diversity. As a lawyer in a wheelchair, she is equally well acquainted with the obstacles diverse workers deal with every day.

So it comes as no surprise that Joyce has put a unique stamp on the Diversity and Inclusion Committee, helping to sharpen its focus on the disability status of BakerHostetler employees.

That said, she wants nothing more than to make the whole subject a non-issue. She and her diverse peers emphatically do not want to call any undue attention to their diversity status. They seek recognition for their skills, their qualities, and their contributions to the firm—not for their differences.

Joyce is keenly attuned to what makes an effective diversity program. “It can’t be in name only,” she says, and she gives BakerHostetler high marks for follow-through. With regular meetings, sponsored events, a bi-annual conference, and a wide variety of localized efforts across all offices, there is clearly a firm wide commitment to keeping diversity at the top of the firm’s priorities for years to come.

This is not just about “doing the right thing.” Joyce believes that as more and more clients insist on diverse staffing in all their matters, the firm’s high level of commitment has become a true differentiator in the marketplace—that companies will tend to award business to firms like ours once they are aware of how deep the diversity efforts run. There is, in other words, a business advantage to be gained.

While much progress has been made, Joyce is well aware that diversity is an ongoing educational process with no end in sight. She understands that success is difficult to measure and that 100 percent success may never be achievable. But with the firm’s unequivocal commitment, she sees the ultimate goals as well worth the effort.
Greg Ulmer was a fourth-year associate when he walked through the doors of BakerHostetler’s Houston office in 1999. A national footprint and a comprehensive platform were the right mix of ingredients to help Greg to grow his practice. But Greg knew BakerHostetler offered more than a name to attract clients. He could easily see people at the firm benefited enormously from the firm’s commitment to excellence in legal service. It meant opportunity—for both attorneys and clients alike. To Greg, the kind of firm that worked hard to provide its clients with creative solutions was the kind of firm that encouraged its attorneys to think outside the box. Greg hit the ground running.

He remembers early on in his career Litigation Group Chair Ray Whitman asking him to fly to L.A. and take depositions for a class action involving Shell. The request reflected what Greg already knew about the firm: that he could count on frequent opportunities to get practical and real experience. He continued to try cases for major clients as a young attorney, staking his reputation as a top-notch litigator on work he could call his own. This wholehearted encouragement to rise through the ranks was not something he likely would have encountered at another firm. Now he represents Caterpillar, one of the firm’s largest clients, in product liability cases that come up in the Southwest.

Having done it himself, Greg pushes the office’s new associates to “take the bull by the horns” and make the best of the opportunities that come their way. “It’s the kind of thing that builds on itself,” he tells them. “You learn by maneuvering the obstacles and coming out ahead; it sets you up to be a leader.”
“Whom I work for has made and continues to have the biggest impact on my work at the firm. They trust me to get the job done. That kind of encouragement and support brings out the best in you.”
“At the end of the day, you have to be purposeful in your actions. We have to say that the next time there’s an opening for a leadership role, we make sure that we are including and actively considering our diverse partners. It’s important to not just commit to it, but to do it.”
Looking for talent in all the right places

Edward Jacobs
E-Discovery Advocacy and Management Practice Leader

The statistics of inclusion in the legal industry are a disappointment to Ted Jacobs. He believes the industry, like so many others, continues to underachieve at providing workplace environments that accurately mirror the demographics of the population at large. This is especially true at the top levels of many law firms, whose management committees may have little or no representation of women or diverse attorneys.

At BakerHostetler, Ted has been impressed with the firm’s awareness of the issue and willingness to confront it. When he joined us in 2011, official LGBT policies were not yet in place, and he didn’t know how friendly a place it might be for openly gay attorneys. Yet, right from the start, Ted felt accepted and supported, both professionally and personally. He quickly made partner, which had not happened at his previous firm, despite its progressive reputation. Soon after that, the firm asked Ted to lead its e-discovery advocacy and management team. In addition, the firm has worked with Ted and others every step of the way to make sure we follow best practices in creating an inclusive environment for LGBT attorneys, including amending many of our policies to reflect equality and fairness for employees as the legal landscape concerning LGBT issues has changed. In addition, each office at the firm has an active diversity committee that seeks to not only attract, retain and support diverse attorneys, but also to educate the firm as a whole on subjects such as unconscious bias that help foster an atmosphere in which people feel comfortable bringing their whole selves to work.

Ted attributes his success to the collegial and supportive environment at the firm, where talent and hard work are recognized. To Ted, paying close attention to inclusion is, above all, good business. He knows through his own experiences that the richness of perspectives and opinions that emerge from diverse teams cannot help but lead to better strategic thinking, better decision-making and, ultimately, to better client service. This commitment is reflected in the diversity of Ted’s team and all that he does at the firm.