

Spotlight on...Sylvia James, Winston & Strawn's Director of Diversity & Inclusion

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Winston & Strawn's Director of Diversity & Inclusion, [Sylvia James](#), shares insights on diversity in this Spotlight Q&A.

Why Winston? What attracted you to this role and to the firm?

I was attracted to Winston because enhancing diversity is part of the firm's strategic plan. A lot of firms give lip service to diversity, but here, firm leadership views diversity as a business priority, not just a good thing to do. Very often diversity is siloed, and I was attracted to being part of a team that included human resources, recruiting, coaching, learning and development, and corporate social responsibility. A cross-functional talent team makes collaboration among the various departments much easier, which leads to better results for the firm. Chicago Managing Partner [Linda Coberly](#) and Chair of the firm's Women's Leadership Initiative (WLI) [Paula Hinton](#) are magnificent forces of nature. I was immediately drawn to their energy, passion, support for diversity and inclusion, and their belief in my ability to help the firm enhance its diversity programs, performance, and profile.

Can you tell us about the focus for the newly formed Talent Department and the mission for the group?

I'm excited to work with the Diversity Committee, affinity group chairs, firm leadership, the talent team, D&I team, and other stakeholders to help the firm enhance its diversity performance and profile. We will soon be rolling out high-quality diversity and inclusion programs that will help us recognize and celebrate the diversity that exists in our workforce, and foster an inclusive work environment. Within the next few months, I will begin conducting unconscious bias training for all lawyers and staff. I believe that a true understanding of unconscious bias and how we can mitigate its effects, both individually and as an institution, will help us move the needle on diversity.

For those starting their careers—both attorneys and staff—can you offer some tips on how to be successful?

Relationships matter. It's vital to do good work and be responsive, but it is also critically important to develop relationships with lawyers and staff. As a young lawyer, I underestimated the importance of relationship building and kept my head down doing work and passing up opportunities to build meaningful relationships with my colleagues. Fortunately, I had mentors who nudged me gently to get out of my office and find better balance. Developing meaningful relationships with people inside and outside the firm has been instrumental to my success.

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