

## Kobi Kennedy Brinson Featured in *Law360* Minority Powerbrokers Q&A

JANUARY 20, 2015

*This article originally appeared on [Law360](#) as part of their Minority Powerbrokers Q&A series.*

Kobi Kennedy Brinson is a litigation partner in Winston & Strawn LLP's Charlotte, North Carolina, office and focuses her practice on representing financial services and other clients in government inquiries, and other regulatory and consumer finance matters.

Prior to recently joining Winston & Strawn, Brinson managed complex consumer class actions, and cases involving Ponzi schemes and allegations of customer fraud for the past four years at Bank of America. During that time, Brinson also handled significant government inquiries as part of the litigation and consumer regulatory enforcement groups. Before her time at Bank of America, Brinson was assistant general counsel at Wachovia/Wells Fargo for seven years, where she oversaw, among other things, mortgage and credit card class actions.

As a participant in Law360's Minority Powerbrokers Q&A series, Brinson shared her perspective on five questions:

**Q: How did you break the glass ceiling in the legal industry?**

A: That depends on the definition of glass ceiling. Given the disproportionately low numbers of African-American female partners at major firms, my admission to partnership could be perceived by some as a breakthrough, but the women of color who preceded me are the glass breakers. I am following in their footsteps. That said, my path to partnership was unusual. I began my career as a state trial court law clerk, which was followed by stints in the public defender's offices in two states, a small law office, a large civil firm, three financial institutions, and finally, Winston & Strawn. I think my personal success is due to providing effective and efficient advice and counsel, strategic job selection, and an extraordinary network which includes my partners at Winston.

**Q: What are the challenges of being a lawyer of color at a senior level?**

A: During my career, I have had the good fortune to work with a variety of cultures and in different situations, but the underlying challenge across the board has been the constant pressure to "prove" my intellectual worth and efficacy despite my degrees, experience and career successes in private and public sector practice. While by no means universal, the fact that African-American lawyers are still faced with this dilemma demonstrates the need for a culture

shift amongst our legal brethren.

**Q: Describe a time you encountered discrimination in your career and tell us how you handled it.**

A: While discrimination in the modern age tends to be covert, rather than the sign-carrying days of old, I have experienced a few jarring moments during my career. One of the first examples, but not unusual I fear, was early in my career when a white male colleague asked incredulously upon meeting me for the first time, “How did YOU get into Harvard Law School?” I responded plainly, “I applied. They accepted me. But, of course, the question should be, ‘How did I get OUT of Harvard Law School?’ The answer to that question is that I graduated like everyone else.” I could recite other examples, but in each my response is to be transparent and educational where possible.

**Q: What advice would you give to a lawyer of color?**

A: My advice to lawyers of color is always the same: 1) Be amazing at your job. The old adage that African-American attorneys must be twice as good to get half as far still appears to be true if statistical data is accurate. 2) Never underestimate the power of being you. It is difficult to find two people with absolutely nothing in common. Don’t assume that you are not being included because of WHAT you are. Let people know WHO you are and learn the same about them. 3) Opportunities abound. Make sure you are in the position to take advantage when they come. Be a subject matter expert. Be engaged. Be interested. But mostly, be prepared.

**Q: What advice would you give to a law firm looking to increase diversity in its partner ranks?**

A: My number one piece of advice for law firms looking to increase diversity in their partner ranks is to not expect something different for minority attorneys than for others. While it may sound obvious that similarly situated people should be treated similarly, firms need to be more aware of implicit biases that prevent this.

For example in recruiting efforts, a firm with lawyers from a wide spectrum of law schools should not recruit minorities only among the few who graduated from, say, Harvard Law School. And when looking at partner candidates, law firms (like their corporate clients) need to be aware of different standards that result from implicit biases. For instance, job promotions often are based on perceived development potential, so someone with 25 percent of the skills required is promoted based on the perceived ability to train for the other 75 percent. Unfortunately, the opposite has been shown true for minority candidates, with promotions more often requiring a “perfect fit” versus “development potential.” Firm leaders and decision makers need to be more aware of the role these biases play in their hiring and promotion decisions, in order to combat them and level the playing field

4 Min Read

---

## Related Locations

Charlotte

## Related Topics

Opportunity & Inclusion

## Related Capabilities

Financial Services Litigation

## Related Professionals

---



Kobi Kennedy Brinson