

The 2021 WIPL Awards: Law Firm Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Champion

Tanisha James, Partner, Cooley LLP

What was your route to the top?

Great question, though I'm not sure I'm at the top I see for myself. There's more to come! As for how I got to where I am today, it was a combination of things: I'm a child of immigrants; I grew up in very humble circumstances in places that weren't easy to navigate; and I had no real models for the life I wanted to have. Overcoming that necessarily involved having a supportive family, working hard, being a visionary, being creative in how I went about acquiring skills/experiences, ensuring I was well-positioned to take advantage of opportunities –and having people in my corner as amazing teachers, mentors, sponsors and sounding boards to provide advice, vet ideas or just fill in knowledge and perspective gaps.

Looking back, what do you wish you had known when you started out in the legal profession?

The power that is available when you combine excellence and authenticity. I believe becoming a great lawyer (or anything really) is equal parts mastering the necessary skills to do the "job" and going about that job in the way that most authentically represents you and what you are able to bring to the table for the benefit of whomever you are representing. Just having the skills are great but are certainly fungible and don't set you apart or showcase what you're truly capable of, which might be more

in line with what is actually needed. Combining excellence and mastery of your craft with your unique and authentic expression of self allows you to access a higher level of achievement, positive results and maximize impact.

What is the best leadership advice you've given or received, and why do you think it was effective?

"Run your own race" and adopt the mindset that you are your only competition. In a profession and world that is often marked by competitiveness and comparison, it is not only a freeing concept that allows you to put energy into what really matters, but is an important reminder to look within, envision what you want for your life/career and be laser focused on achieving it while being the best that you can be as an individual, lawyer, etc. You are the only person who can "do you." Trying to do or be anything else compromises your effectiveness. It is sound advice because it is grounded in fundamental truths, including that the only variable we each control is ourselves. Radical perhaps, yet nonetheless empowering.



Tanisha James, with Cooley.

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