

# Life Beyond the Buzzwords

By Satra Sampson-Arokium, Director of Diversity & Inclusion at Dechert LLP

For some, *inclusiveness* is just a vague state of mind. I can tell you from experience, though, that inclusiveness is very much an active endeavor.

After two years as director of diversity and inclusion at Dechert LLP, and three more years in the same role at another global law firm, I've learned to embrace the personal and professional challenges that come with my position—challenges that can fulfill and frustrate in equal measure.

When I joined Dechert in 2017, I found a forward-thinking firm that was already trending in the right direction. I could see the firm valued creativity and innovation, and recognized the value of a more diversified workforce. Even before I came on board, an internal task force had been formed that developed a series of concrete recommendations to better realize Dechert's commitment to diversity. All the firm needed was someone who knew how to implement and expand upon the task force's recommendations.

Two years later, I'm proud of what Dechert has achieved: a partner-led Diversity and Inclusion Committee; affinity groups to support and address diversity and inclusion-related issues for our Asian, Black, Latino, LGBT, and veteran lawyers; a global women's initiative; and an LGBT Allies Program; as well as workshops, networking events, and recruiting and training initiatives.

This year, Dechert scored a perfect 100 in the Human Rights Campaign survey of the best law

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– Maya Angelou

firms for LGBT for the sixth year running. It was also named one of the 2018 Best Law Firms for Women and Top 100 Companies for Women, and made the 2018 Diversity Best Practices Inclusion Index. To cap it all, Dechert Heroes, an affinity group for military veterans and their families, was named one of the Top 10 Innovations in Diversity by *Profiles in Diversity Journal*.

What is the biggest challenge facing Dechert's director of diversity and inclusion? Beyond the simple daily rigor of working with our affinity groups and global women's initiative—finding ways not only to help each of them, but to help them find ways to work *together*—it's the hard fact that demand still far exceeds supply. Like many other law firms, our most significant challenge is retaining some of our best lawyers, due to the intense competition for diverse legal talent.

For me, the future is all about increasing momentum, with a particular focus on three key areas—recruiting more diverse talent, expanding partnerships with the firm's clients and communities, and continued development of the firm's talent.

In a large, successful firm like Dechert, which is both multidisciplinary and multiregional, it's easy for its people to become siloed from each

other. One benefit of my line of work, by its very nature, is that it is unbounded within the firm, involving and integrating everyone—lawyers and business service professionals. Having the opportunity each day to work with so many different people in so many different places can be both exhilarating and exhausting—usually both at the same time! But it is never dull.

I like to think what I do not only advances us toward our goals of diversity and inclusion, but also encourages the openness and collegiality that are so important for a thriving firm—qualities that are particularly valued at Dechert. I try to keep in mind a simple truth Maya Angelou once stated so well: “I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” **PDJ**



**Satra Sampson-Arokium**

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*has 18 plus years as a diversity and inclusion expert and consultant. She will help to advance Dechert's guiding principles of building a more inclusive firm.*