

How This Am Law 200 Firm Committed to Diversity in Partner and Associate Hiring

Most of Thompson Hine’s lateral partners in 2021 are diverse women. And to purge bias from the associate hiring process, the firm has implemented a three-stage interviewing process.

By Dan Packel
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Thompson Hine has succeeded in making three of its first four partner hires in 2021 diverse women, while also bolstering its transactional practices in its new Chicago office and filling a labor and employment hole in Atlanta.

Since the beginning of April, the Am Law 200 firm has added real estate partner Simone Randolph and corporate transactions partner Layla Dotson Lumpkin in Chicago and labor and employment Glianny Fagundo in Atlanta.

The three partner hires not only serve to advance the firm’s practice strength and strategy but serve as an example of an institutional commitment to advancing diversity, said Thompson Hine managing partner Deborah Read. Meanwhile, the Cleveland-based firm has also committed to purging bias from its associate hiring process, implementing a three-stage interviewing process for hiring summer associates and associate laterals.

“If you look at the most innovative and forward-looking institutions, you understand that diversity and inclusion is critical to their success,” she said.

The new associate hiring process at the firm, which has completed Mansfield 3.0 certification, entails a blind 16-factor trait assessment, a blind



(l-r) Thompson Hine’s Glianny Fagundo, Simone Randolph and Layla Dotson Lumpkin.

Courtesy photos

legal writing assessment that compares a candidate’s skills with industry peers, and a behavioral interview panel process using the Situation, Task, Action and Result methodology.

“This process is really designed to eliminate bias and identify those traits and behaviors that are indicators of success,” Read said. “Since the start, we’ve increased representation of attorneys of color and LGBTQ attorneys by nearly 60% and have doubled those who identify as Black.”

And a new diversity, equity and inclusion strategic plan, devised in fall 2019 and implemented in early 2020, directs the firm to focus on recruiting from national law schools with reputations for diversity in order to meet a goal of having 30% of 2L classes filled with racially diverse attorneys. It also demands that for any lateral hires, hiring

teams must identify one qualified diverse candidate for each opening, or provide a justification if one is not available.

“Those are examples of concrete, measurable metrics,” Read says.

The approach has had an impact on new associate and lateral associate hiring as well: the firm’s anticipated 2021 new class of associates is 54.5% female and 45.5% diverse, while the five lateral associates hired so far this year are all women, with two also falling into the diverse category. And the first partner the firm hired in 2021, Washington, D.C., civil engineer and construction attorney Jessica Haire, is also female.

Read, who’s been firmwide managing partner for the last nine years, added that the firm’s eight-member executive committee, which is 50% female or Black and exerts significant power on the firm’s direction, has made recruitment and retention of diverse attorneys a priority. “We made an intentional decision to focus on this,” she said.

Lateral Decision-Making

In separate conversations, Atlanta-based Fagundo, who joined the firm from Taylor English Duma, and Lumpkin and Randolph in Chicago, who worked together at Riley Safer Holmes & Cancila, acknowledged that the firm’s diversity measures were a factor in their decision-making.

“At most firms, they talk a big game when it comes to diversity,” Fagundo said. “But if you look at their managing structure, it’s just white males.”

Lumpkin, whose practice focuses on venture capital financing and mergers and acquisitions,

landed on a similar point, recognizing the firm’s commitment to diversity. “As two diverse women, that’s something that was really important to us, especially in the broader business environment that we’re in today,” she said.

She and Randolph had both been at Riley Safer since 2017, a year after the firm was created from a breakaway group of Schiff Hardin partners. And they’re now part of an expansion of Thompson Hine’s new Chicago office, which opened in 2019.

“We have a lot of Chicago connections and we knew the firm was looking to have a long-term commitment to Chicago,” said Randolph, who focuses on syndicated, mezzanine and construction financing. “It became a match made in heaven, in terms of what the firm was trying to do and our own personal professional goals.”

In Atlanta, the firm turned to Fagundo to fill a need after an existing labor and employment partner left the firm to go in-house with a client. She also pointed to the firm’s “SmartPaTH” system for handling client matters as a crucial part of Thompson Hine’s appeal.

“It goes beyond technology, there is an innovation mindset and tools that have been implemented specifically to help clients with efficiency, transparency, and costs.” she said.

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