

# Stone Soup

## A Recipe For Implementing a Diversity and Inclusion Program in Any Law Office

BY SANFORD E. WATSON

This article is written for those committed to starting or maintaining a diversity and inclusion program within their law office. I have not yet met the lawyer who disagreed with me about the business case for diversity. But when the discussion turns to implementation, concerns about costs, consultants, and staffing tend to make the way forward less clear. This stone soup recipe offers a simple and effective way forward for starting a diversity and inclusion program.

### The Story of Stone Soup

*Stone Soup* is a very old folk tale. Different versions of the story can be traced back to Africa, Asia, and Europe. In all versions of the story, a traveler arrives in a village seeking food and lodging. The traveler goes from house to house in search of a meal but he is turned away at every door.

The traveler then goes to the village square, where he builds a fire, fills a large kettle with water, and places the kettle over the fire. He removes a common smooth stone from a velvet bag and begins to polish it as if it were made of gold. A curious villager comes along and asks the traveler what he is cooking. The traveler proclaims that he is making the most delicious stone soup and offers to share it if only the villager could contribute something to the kettle. Intrigued, the villager hurries home, and returns in a matter of minutes with a bunch of carrots.

Another villager comes along and has a similar conversation with the traveler, and returns with some meat. The conversation gets repeated over and over again until the traveler has added to the kettle a bounty of meat, produce, and spices. The group of villagers anxiously awaits a chance to

taste the stone soup, and when the soup is done, they feast long into the night reaping the benefits of contributing to the pot and working together.

### The Key Ingredient

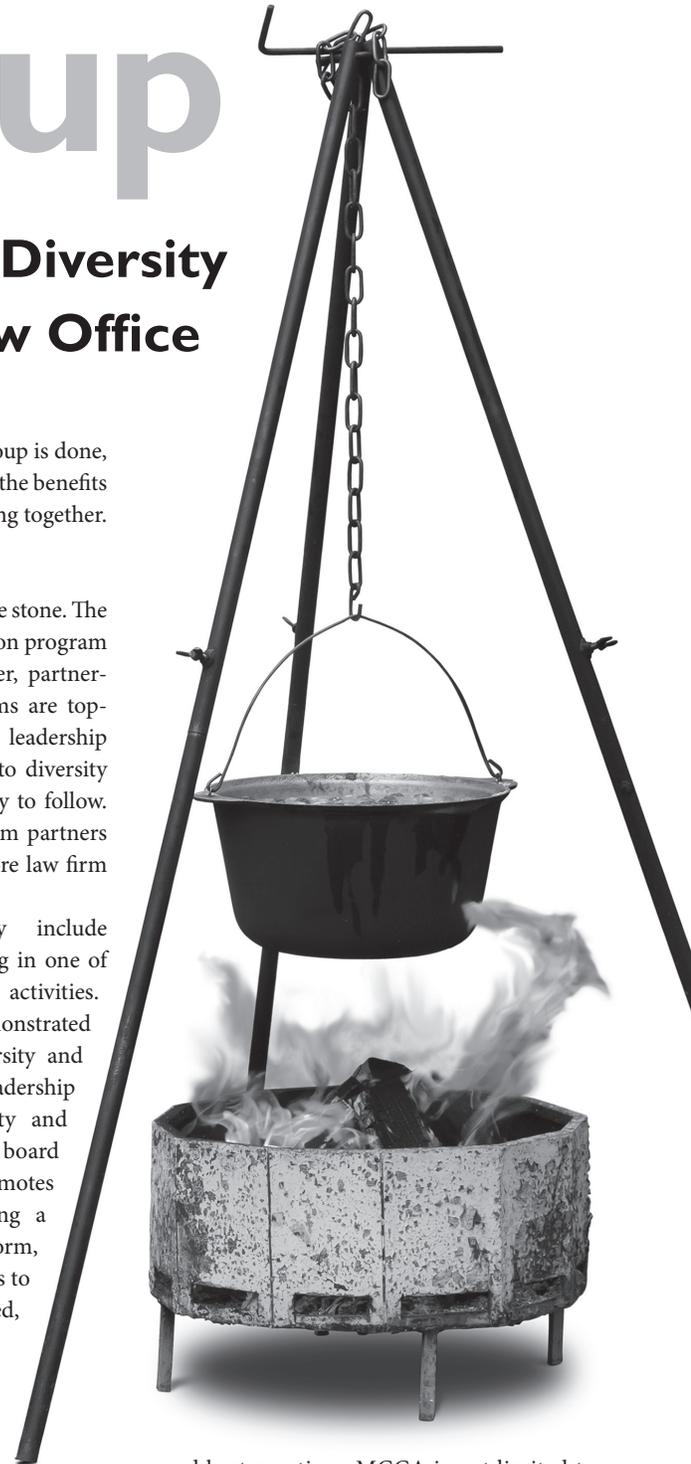
The key ingredient in stone soup is the stone. The “stone” in every diversity and inclusion program is the boss — the managing partner, partner-in-charge, or law director. Law firms are top-down organizations. If the boss or leadership team makes a visible commitment to diversity and inclusion, others are more likely to follow. Exponentially, the more that law firm partners make a visible commitment, the more law firm associates and staff will follow.

A visible commitment may include something as simple as participating in one of the firm’s diversity and inclusion activities. Visible commitment can also be demonstrated by serving on the law firm’s diversity and inclusion committee, taking a leadership role in a bar association diversity and inclusion initiative, or serving on the board of a civic organization that promotes diversity and inclusion. By making a visible commitment in whatever form, the leader sets the example for others to follow. Once the stone is introduced, making stone soup is easy.

### Prepare a Shopping List

Prepare a shopping list of diversity and inclusion best practices to customize your soup recipe. Rest assured you need not create this list from scratch. Best practices for diversity and inclusion are easily accessible from many sources for free and many are available on the web. Here are a few examples:

- Minority Corporate Counsel Association (MCCA) publishes research on its website that covers a broad range of diversity topics



and best practices. MCCA is not limited to covering issues of race; it also covers issues related to gender, generation, LGBT, and work-life balance, among other diversity and inclusion issues. MCCA also identifies best practices for law departments as well as for law firms. The most important note about MCCA is that much of its research is free and available for public access on its website. See [www.mcca.org](http://www.mcca.org).

- The Defense Research Institute (DRI) offers a Diversity and Inclusion Manual that includes a list of best practices that any law office can implement. See [www.dri.org](http://www.dri.org).
- The National Association of Law Placement (NALP) also offers a Diversity Best Practices Guide that covers a broad range of topics beyond recruiting. See [www.nalp.com](http://www.nalp.com).

Once you have surveyed a number of websites, group the best practices into categories. Many of the websites will have already put them into categories. The most common categories are (1) leadership and accountability, (2) recruiting, (3) diversity training, (4) mentoring and retention, (5) work-life balance, (6) affinity groups, (7) pipeline programs, and (8) supplier diversity.

### Take Inventory

Take inventory of the best practice ingredients in your cupboard. Before you go shopping, you need to know what best practices have already been implemented in your office. Compare these ingredients with your shopping list. Use this exercise to evaluate what your firm has already accomplished. It will also identify diversity and inclusion categories where attention is needed. In those areas requiring attention, the list will provide ideas of new best practices to adopt.

### Add Programs From The Village

Before creating any programs from scratch, consider joining the ones available in your village. For those law offices in our local village (of Northeast Ohio), bar associations have a number of excellent programs. Most notably, the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association (CMBA) provides a number of diversity and inclusion programs. CMBA's Diversity Career Fair is a great recruiting tool. CMBA also offers pipeline programs worth exploring, including the Minority Clerkship Program, 3Rs

Program, and Louis Stokes Scholars Program. Other business organizations such as the Greater Cleveland Partnership Commission on Economic Inclusion provide diversity resources to the entire business community including law firms. Other organizations such as the Diversity Center of Northeast Ohio provide a broad array of services. One of the biggest advantages to having a local village with diversity and inclusion programs is the convenience of simply signing up rather than having to create a new program.

### Optional Ingredients

Diversity and inclusion conferences and seminars are an option for training and continuing legal education. These conferences can be a great source of cutting-edge best practices and a forum for the exchange of ideas. Some conferences offer networking and client and career development opportunities for women, minority, and LGBT lawyers.

Some of these conferences are hosted by organizations primarily dedicated to diversity in the legal profession including MCCA, the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity, and the Center for Legal Inclusiveness. Many national bar associations have diversity committees of their own and offer quality diversity and inclusion programming. Finally, there are affinity bar associations — both locally and nationally — that support and address the unique interests of their members. Some examples are Corporate Council Women of Color, National Asian Pacific American Bar Association, National Bar Association (locally the Norman S. Minor Bar Association), National Hispanic Bar Association, and National LGBT Bar Association.

### Finishing the Soup

How stone soup is finished depends upon the

culture, size, and resources of the law firm. The beauty of this recipe is its simplicity. It is up to each law firm or law office to figure out which ingredients fit its best practice needs and add them to the pot. Once you figure it out, you've got stone soup.

Stone soup is an economical way of getting started. Because hiring consultants or diversity and inclusion professionals can be so costly, it is not part of the basic recipe; however, consultants do play a valuable role in shaping diversity and inclusion policy. They may be the best resource for training — particularly unconscious bias training — because they are independent of the organization being trained. Some diversity and inclusion consultants can do it all, including making stone soup.

At Tucker Ellis, we started our stone soup using the basic recipe. Taking inventory for the first time was rewarding because it highlighted all of the things we were doing right. We also found our culture of community service made joining CMBA pipeline programs and working with students a natural fit. Each year, we take inventory and as we change as a firm, our recipe for stone soup changes. The most important thing was making the commitment to get started by making stone soup.



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