



About two years after passing the bar exam, a cold call came to my direct line. “A Black woman estate planner? You, my dear, are a unicorn!” the prospective client told me. This potential client, for whatever reason, had made it her personal goal to only be advised by Black women professionals—this included all of her doctors, her therapist, accountant, and financial advisors. Her relief at finding a lawyer who looked like her made all the difference in the trust she bestowed in her counsel.

As a Black lawyer and first-generation college student (and first-generation law school student), the main barrier to accessing the legal profession for me was the lack of exposure to lawyers. Some of my classmates had lawyers or even judges as their parents, siblings, or more distant family members. This lack of access made entering the legal profession appear to be elusive and mysterious. Also, as a law student, I became increasingly frustrated at the uncertainty of what it was that lawyers did all day. I made it my mission to find out, and luckily, with the assistance of professors and attorneys who took time out of their busy lives to speak with a hard-headed and chatty law student, I was able to gain insight and discovered that trusts and estates was my calling.

It is especially true in the trusts and estates world that clients having an attorney they identify with can make an immense impact on the trust between attorney and client, and on the client’s ability to communicate their goals. While many people with lower net-worths may tell me, “I don’t have any money, so I don’t need to do my estate planning,” the truth is that estate planning can be useful for estates of all sizes. Getting this message to a diverse population can be more effective when a person from that diverse community delivers it.

Last year, the Diversity Committee of the Philadelphia

Bar Association’s Probate Section, for which I am honored to serve as current Chair, invited Professor Keeva Terry of Howard Law School to speak about the racial wealth gap at a program entitled “Black Assets Matter: Exploring the Racial Wealth Gap in America.” Professor Terry’s suggestions for mitigating the wealth gap experienced by Black Americans can also be applied to advancing diversity, equity and inclusion in the legal field.

Being that Professor Kerry has already done the research, I am obliged to reiterate her teachings here. She suggested requiring financial literacy programs in K-12 schools, and more programming to increase diverse attorneys in trusts and estates. By learning financial literacy and engaging in estate planning to preserve wealth for the next generation, diverse populations gain the knowledge to mitigate oppressive structural barriers, such as the racial wage gap.

Further, by performing outreach to individuals about what estate planning is, and why it’s important for everyone to do, regardless of the size of their estate, we can share knowledge that would otherwise not be provided to diverse populations.

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CELEBRATING

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