

Lighting the Way

To a better, more equal judiciary

Recently, I found myself telling an inner city Law 12 class that what uniquely equipped them to succeed in the job market today is a sense of “equality.” Our discussion revolved around law – the profession is ancient and is somewhat resistant to change. We focused less on the apparent negative feelings that stem from that past and moved on to the positive light of the future. I wanted to instill *the dream*: equal rights and opportunities irrespective of gender, ethnicity, religion, or orientation. An optimist might fuel these young champions of equality and instill positive citizenship. I hope they make good in the world.

My passion for diversity comes from the fact that I was born and raised in Surrey, BC to first generation Punjabi speaking Indian immigrants. I have a Chinese last name. Imagine a field hockey pitch covered with ice and a mish mash of burgers, fries, hot dogs and pizza with the aroma of curries, sweets and of course butter chicken. I’m now vegetarian – thanks Vancouver.

In my view, to succeed in the world it is important to know who you are and be comfortable with it. What is important is what you do and how you do it, not where you come from or what you look like. Diversity is what drives better insights and better decisions. It is the backbone of innovation and advancement. We are animals – in nature,

if we relied on one food source our chances of extinction increase drastically. The business world is penalized as well – Kodak missed the digital revolution, recognize that name? What does this mean for the legal profession, and specifically



the judiciary? After all, our courts should be reflective of the patchwork quilt of society, right? The CBA is committed to this cause.

On May 27, 2014 the CBA co-hosted the second installment of

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Building Diversity on the Bench. The event was sponsored by the Law Society of BC, the South Asian Bar Association, the Federation of Asian-Canadian Lawyers-BC, and the Canadian Association of Black Lawyers. The event was well-attended and webcast across BC. The speakers included judges

and lawyers who were courageous and inspirational in sharing their experiences and views on diversity.

The diversity statistics in our courts are alarming and the panel agreed that it is cause for concern. We need to practice what we preach and exemplify those beliefs through our actions. We need to have a sense of urgency when it comes to diversity. Imagine British Columbians collectively challenging our court system as unreflective of its people. We need to be courageous as people from different backgrounds and put forward applications for ap-



pointment to the Bench. A diverse judiciary is one of the best ways for lawyers to be a force for good in the world. This is our calling. Someone who enters the legal system, for personal or business problems, will need to see their world reflected on the Bench.

I might be a little bright-eyed and optimistic, but we are being handed a torch to a future of greater diversity. We need to light the way to a better, more equal court. For information about applying to the Bench, consult the local provincial and federal courts.

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