

Patterson Belknap Is Latest Firm to Add C-Suite Talent Role

By Dan Packel
January 4, 2019

Another Big Law firm has created a new executive-level position aimed at increasing diversity in the ranks and improving the experience of rising attorneys.

New York-based Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler has named 12-year-veteran Michelle Cohen its first “chief people, diversity and professional development officer.” Cohen remains of counsel at the firm, her most recent role after joining in 2006 and being named partner in 2013.

“I bring a unique perspective for this role to this firm,” Cohen said. “I’ve walked in our associates’ shoes before, and I’ve been a beneficiary of many of the programs that I’m now championing.”

She pointed to the firm’s training programs on diversity that have spotlighted the issue of implicit bias, improvements in the evaluation and check-in process for associates, and the creation of resource groups at the firm aimed at supporting attorneys of color, female attorneys and LGBT attorneys.

“With this role, I will be able to leverage all of that work and also to leverage new technology we have acquired, and I am committed to continue to make Patterson the professional home that has always put us on top of associate surveys,” Cohen added.

She pointed to her own path climbing the ladder from third-year associate to partner, her understanding of the challenges of being a working mother, and the



Michelle Cohen

experience of returning to her practice from maternity leave on three occasions.

Cohen acknowledged that Patterson is one of a number of firms that have been creating roles focused on increasing diversity and inclusion, calling it a challenge not just for firms but also for clients.

“I’m hoping to increase the number of female attorneys and diverse attorneys practicing, and not just practicing but getting to the next level in their careers as well,” she said.

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