

# To Improve Diversity and Inclusion, Use Your Law Firm's Brand | Clio

*Katy Goshtasbi*

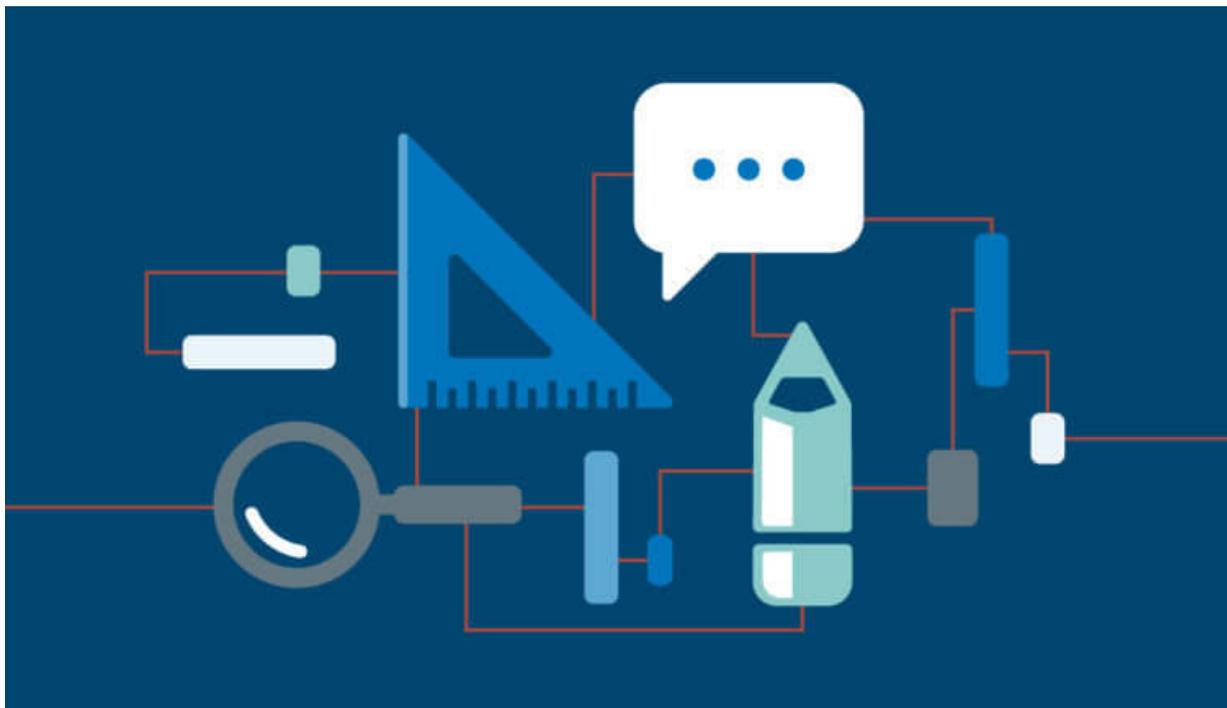
There have long been discussions on how to increase diversity, be more inclusive as a legal profession, and eliminate bias and discrimination. I remember twenty-three years ago when I graduated law school, this was a debatable topic.

As a legal community, we are still mulling over these issues. Now more than ever, it's important for the legal community to step up as leaders, counsel and advisers and lead innovative conversations in increasing diversity and equity and becoming more inclusive as a profession. According to the latest [ABA National Lawyer Population Survey](#), 86% of lawyers are white, a statistic that hasn't changed much over the past decade.

The good news is that each and every one of us can be a catalyst for change and growth. The first requirement is that we spend time in our own communities and practices to see how we can make the difference when it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the legal profession.

This article will look at how lawyer brand development can be successfully implemented as a tool to increase diversity, increase Emotional Quotient (EQ), reduce bias, and make us a more inclusive legal community. This will allow more innovative and creative solutions to show up in the legal profession for the benefit of lawyers, our clients, and society as a whole.

## A primer on branding



A business brand is something that raises awareness about your legal practice. It's felt and not seen.

A good business brand does not stand alone. **An effective business brand stands foundationally on the shoulders of an effective personal brand for each lawyer representing the law firm's business brand.** And if everyone at your firm looks the same—in terms of gender, race, age, sexual orientation, and so on—you're likely missing out on connections with potential clients.

I define Personal Brand as a process of:

1. Unearthing your unique and relevant attributes
2. Communicating these attributes consistently to your audience
3. Managing how your audience perceives this brand

Thus, in order for the business brand to function well and get results for the law firm, each lawyer should have a well-defined personal brand and an intentional branding plan in place. This plan is suited to who they are, as a person, not as a lawyer.

For more on the definition of a brand, [please refer to this article](#).

The benefits of a well-defined brand are many. When you (and your law firm) know who you are, this leads to efficient decision making, effective leadership, a stronger firm culture, increased growth—and crucially, reduced bias.

However, many law firms still face challenges with their brand. The two main impediments to a successful brand are **bias** and **low EQ**.

## What is Bias?

The concept of bias refers to a disproportionate favor towards an idea or thing, for example, an individual, a group, or a belief. It can be innate or learned. Maybe you don't like the name "John" because when you were younger, a boy named John picked on you. As an adult, you may still have a bias against people named John. You would never know of your bias unless you were self-aware enough to stop and notice.

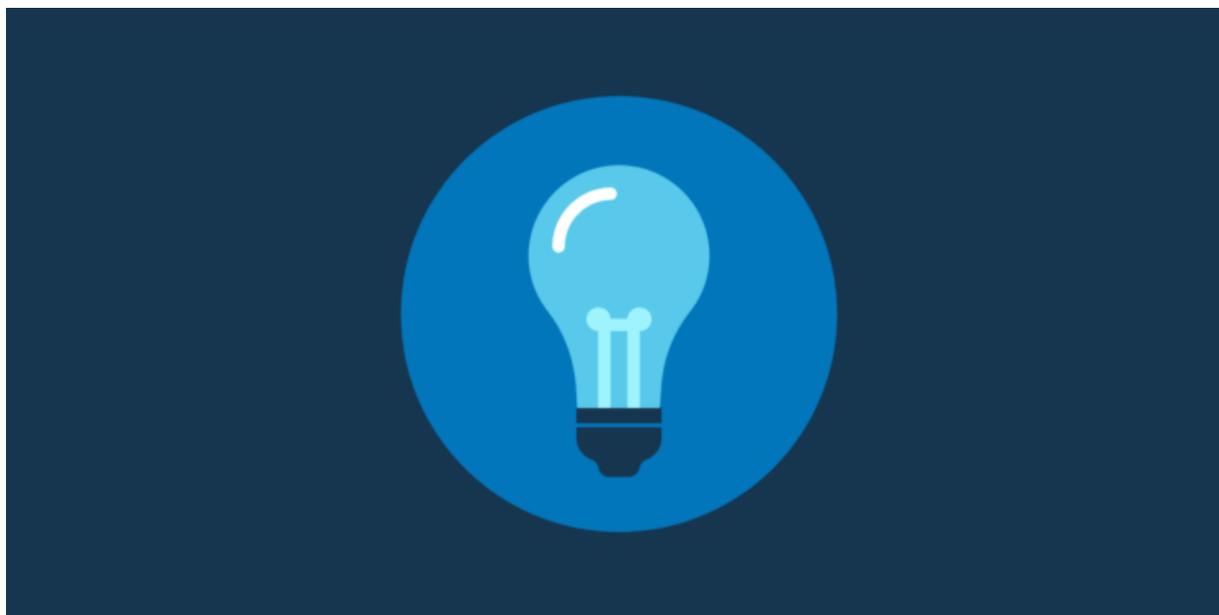
This issue is central today, as millions in America and across the world reckon with their own racial bias, racial injustice, and systemic racism. The truth is, racism and biases exist in every aspect of life, including law firm workplaces.

The central tenant of brand development is self-awareness. Only through self-awareness can you face your own biases and develop your brand. Self-awareness forces you to be open-minded, examining various aspects of what you believe and truly want to be representative of your brand—and what needs to go. Once you know your own brand, you can't help but become extremely self-aware-always.

Thus, developing your brand allows you to clearly see and if you choose, to overcome, your biases.

[Learn more about eliminating racial bias in this free webinar from Clio and Risha Grant.](#)

## What is EQ?



Your EQ, or your [emotional intelligence](#), is the “level of your ability to understand other people, what motivates them and how to work cooperatively with them.”

Successful law firm brands have high EQ.

There are five often-cited components to EQ. They are:

- Self-awareness
- Self-regulation
- Empathy
- Motivation
- Social skills.

Once again, as with good brand development and reducing bias, self-awareness is key for improving your EQ.

In the context of EQ development, self-awareness is about your ability to first recognize, and then define and control your emotions as you strive to understand other people. You'll seek to understand their motivations and work cooperatively with them.

**The result of effective branding is your ability, as a lawyer, to sell the emotional value of your legal brand.** Thus, before you can emotionally and successfully sell your legal brand, you must be able to recognize, define and master your own emotions.

Bias and lack of diversity in the workplace is often propagated by those who lack EQ because of a lack of self-awareness; they don't notice bias and diversity issues as a problem because they are not aware of their own emotions. How could a person notice biases or appreciate the benefits of diversity if they are not self-aware of their own emotions and how they come across as a result of these emotions?

When we are self-aware, we are aware of our own emotions, and we have a higher EQ. As a result, we are inherently more likely to notice biases and be appreciative of the diversity that is in our world.

## How To Improve Law Firm Diversity & Inclusion With Your Brand



Diverse lawyers bring diverse opinions, allowing for law firm growth. Law firm brands that grow are the ones open to diverse views and change. In studies it has been shown that a) while homogeneity may feel better, [it leads to poor performance](#) and b) [diverse teams make better decisions](#) even if the diverse make-up makes it feel harder to do so. Also, in 2015, a [McKinsey report](#) found that diverse management organizations were 35% more likely to have financial returns above the industry mean.

Diversity requires a new way of looking at your law firm brand and each employee brand. How do you do this? First, stop and consider your EQ by reviewing how self-aware you are.

Are you, for example, leading with behavior that sets an example in terms of improving diversity, inclusion, and equity for others in your firm (even if you are not the actual boss or leader in the firm)? Are you taking action instead of turning away from any issues that could reduce diversity? (Often, what works is a simple conversation around the idea that we are all unique humans with our own emotions, and that your goal is to come together as lawyers to build a better law firm culture and industry.)

Are you educating clients by ensuring they know and appreciate the diversity values that are part of your firm brand? You can only attract clients that appreciate your firm dynamics if you lead with diversity in mind.

## A 4-step process to reimagining your law firm brand with diversity and EQ in mind

How can law firms go about improving their brand, increasing diversity, and improving EQ? Here is a 4-step process I developed and implement with clients:

1. **Unearth and Develop the “brand.”** Each lawyer must have their own unique personal brand that they can own. This personal brand will feed into the law firm brand. With this process, EQ is being measured and increased, bias is being reduced and each lawyer is owning their uniqueness, increasing self-confidence. This process allows culture to flourish, whereby each lawyer feels comfortable at work and ready to succeed.
2. **Educate your team.** Establish a process to allow each employee to learn and know about each other's brand, circumstances, and personal story. This knowledge will help to increase diversity and grow the firm brand. Weekly lunchtime gatherings are a great place to educate. Have lawyers share who they are and their learnings on this topic.
3. **Create an intentional hiring plan.** What would a diverse workforce at your firm look like? Creating an intentional hiring plan is crucial to knowing what you want, don't want, should have, and where to find it. Defining your firm's [vision and values](#) can help here.
4. **Create a plan on how to manage bias and diversity issues, should they occur.** Lawyers are busy. It is hard to juggle substantive legal issues and law firm management tasks with human resource issues. However, it's not ok to ignore any diversity and bias issues that come up. Not only does it hurt the brand, it stunts growth and goes against the values and ethics of your firm. Having a plan in place to address these issues is necessary. For instance, who is the person an attorney goes to initially if there is an issue? What happens after that? How is the entire firm included in the issue in order to create a solution, build awareness and culture? [Take a look at this sample plan to get started.](#)

## Conclusion

As lawyers, we have a responsibility to our clients, colleagues, and our profession to do our part to increase diversity, be more inclusive, and abate bias issues. By developing the individual brands of each attorney at your firm, you will be positioned not only to have a strong law firm brand and grow your business, but to increase your collective EQ, create a more diverse and inclusive environment, and reduce bias—building a thriving culture. I think we can all agree that's something worth working toward.

*This post was published on September 3, 2020.*

Categorized in: [Marketing](#)



## THE IMPACT OF STRESS ON SELF CONFIDENCE AND YOUR BRAND RESEARCH SUMMARY

By Katy Goshtasbi, JD

Updated April 2017

Stress is a large factor in most peoples' lives. Although average stress levels have decreased, many Americans say they struggle to achieve their healthy living goals and that their eating and sleeping are affected by stress.<sup>1</sup>

Stress is defined as “a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well being” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Schneider, Gruman, & Coutts, 2012). Stress manifests as we go through the process of encountering a stressor, judging how we can respond to such stressor, and then responding to the particular stress-inducing event (Schneider, Gruman, & Coutts, 2012).

The stress response a person has in any particular situation is based on the level of resources they have to deal, or cope, with that particular situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It is also based on their general anxiety level or “trait anxiety”, defined as how prone an individual is to see the world as worrisome and fear inducing.

Coping pertains to thoughts, feeling or behaviors (Schneider, Gruman, & Coutts, 2012). How a person copes with stress defines how much the stress in their lives impacts the person and thus, their interaction with others personally and professionally, thus defining how others view the person.

Self-Confidence, or the amount of value we place on ourselves, is a part of our individual self-concept and is a large part of a person's resonance with others in their sphere of influence and world. Self-confidence shapes how a person defines his/her own brand<sup>2</sup> and how others perceive his/her individual brand. Self-confidence is thus a coping mechanism.

Reflecting on personal values can keep neuroendocrine and psychological responses to stress at low levels (Creswell JD and colleagues, 2005). In brand development work with clients, an emphasis is placed on defining individual brand values. These individual brand values are then used to define and shape the overall brand culture of an organization.

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<sup>1</sup> Stress In America, Paying With Our Health, survey. Released February 4, 2015; [www.stressinamerica.com](http://www.stressinamerica.com).

<sup>2</sup> Personal Brand is defined as: a) The process of unearthing your unique and relevant characteristics and attributes; b) communicating these characteristics and attributes consistently to your audience; and c) how your audience perceives your characteristics and attributes.

#### Research Query:

A) How is self-confidence a resource in dealing with stress and what is the relationship between self-confidence and stress as they impact a person's brand perception? B) How is this relationship relevant in business environments?

#### Hypothesis:

As stress increases, self-confidence starts to proportionally and inversely drop, thereby reducing a person's brand value to where they are no longer resonating emotionally with their audience. This lack of resonance will likely impact relationship building and trust in a business environment, which in turn likely impacts productivity.

Activities and resources that increase a person's self-confidence can also improve coping with stress, thereby directly reducing stress in proportion with the increase in self-confidence.

#### Control Elements:

Two main factors seem to influence a person's self-confidence: stress and a person's propensity towards general or trait anxiety. For purposes of this study, the level of general/trait anxiety was not a focal point. The focal point was stress responses derived from a) personal values and b) activities designed to directly impact self-confidence.

Results were weighted as needed for age, sex, occupation and sampling errors.

#### Population Studied:

Professionals (white collar, regardless of formal education), 24 to 65 years of age, female and male.

#### Testing:

One hundred individuals were studied. Participants volunteered with the incentive that they would get a better understanding of his/her brand resonance and impact/performance in his/her careers/jobs.

To establish a baseline, all participants:

- a) were given a set of grid, simple response and multiple-response questions regarding their stress and self-confidence; and,
- b) were asked to give a 5- minute speech in front of an unfamiliar audience on an unfamiliar topic, where the audience was asked to rate their perception of how "competent", "likeable" and "smart" each individual speaker was to them personally.

The groups were then split randomly in two:

Group One: Asked to: a) reflect on and list their most important values, b) asked to read two to four statements that others who knew them well had written about why they chose to associate with this Group A person, and; c) were each given one verbal compliment regarding their physical appearance and mental aptitude.

Group Two: the control group was not asked to participate in any further activity.

Both groups were then exposed to two high stress activities: a) taking a timed math test and b) again giving a 5-minute speech in front of another unfamiliar audience on another unfamiliar topic.

Both groups were then put back in front of their initial audience to rate their perception of how “competent”, “likeable” and “smart” each individual was.

#### Results:

Group One:

- Performed the timed math test significantly better than the control group
- Their second speech was ranked differently by the audience- the audience responded that the person giving the speech was increasingly more competent/credible and thus more likeable. The individual audience member also stated that they would want to associate and engage in conversation with the Group One presenter.
- Their overall stress was reported as lower.

Extrapolating this research to corporations and employees would suggest the impact of increasing self-confidence and/or reducing stress for employees at work is critical to their success and the organization’s success.

In the work environment when stress is lower than self-confidence, then the employee perceives themselves as more valuable to the organization and resulting behavior would likely include applying themselves more to their job duties, establishing and sustaining a better work relationship with colleagues and producing better and more frequent results.

In turn, other employees would likely view their colleague as more competent and likeable. Thus, they likely would associate better with such colleague to achieve more organizational goals and results, thereby directly impacting an organization’s bottom line figures/revenues.