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At the inception of the Connecticut Bar Association's Diversity and Inclusion Plan, the then-CBA president attended a section meeting to promote it. At the end of the presentation, one attorney stood up and passionately objected to the plan. When the attorney was pressed to explain the reasoning behind opposing it, one particular part of their response became indelibly stamped into my memory: "BECAUSE NOBODY HELPED ME."

I do not know that lawyer's story, so I cannot unequivocally say that the claim was false. However, it is undeniably true that some of us have received a lot more help than others in making our way into and navigating the legal profession. That, of course, is part of the very reason for the Diversity and Inclusion Plan.

# "Because Nobody Helped Me"

By David A. McGrath

What help did I have?

Academic privilege helped me. Of my four grandparents, two held masters' degrees, one held a bachelor's degree, and one was a registered nurse. As far back as I can remember, I simply took for granted that I would attend and graduate from college. With my family being so well-versed in the educational system, they too took that fact for granted, even when I stumbled along the way. The confidence of success helped bring about that success.

Economic privilege helped me. There was never any doubt in my mind that my family would assist me with the cost of post-secondary education. I was never distracted in school as a child because I was hungry. I never had to choose between studying or working a second job to make my rent payments. I never had to take a semester off to work to pay my tuition.

Class privilege helped me. I grew up in a town with the resources to prepare its children for college and the expectation that every child must go. Without exception, every high school classmate that I knew went on to attend college the following year.

Racial privilege helped me. I have never been on the receiving end of unconscious or overt bias based on the color of my skin. I have never suffered subconscious doubt because no one else in a testing room looked like me. I am confident that some

of the minor youthful indiscretions (given the news as of late, I should clarify that I do mean minor and inoffensive indiscretions that were not harmful to others) of those in my social circle would have had different consequences for those with a different skin color. People who look like me get warnings and benefit of the doubt more often than not. I never had any reason to fear being disbelieved, hassled, or harmed by the police.

Gender and sexual orientation privilege helped me. I never had to walk the many impossible contradictions faced by women in our society. I never faced sexual harassment or discrimination during my education or career. I never had to endure the tremendous psychological burden of hiding who I love for fear of discrimination.

All of these privileges were simply baked in by the lottery of my birth. I did not do anything to deserve or earn any of it. The benefits were cumulative, beginning with little seemingly insignificant pieces that led to many other small building blocks over time. My parents helped with my homework and were able to provide an educational home environment, which assisted in my selection for an advanced math group in grade school, which helped me be better prepared for algebra down the road, which made it more likely that I would take calculus, and thereby have a better transcript for college applications. I could come up with

countless similar little pieces that built into more meaningful advantages. There were helping hands guiding me toward success at every turn in every area. Because of these privileges, I was in the right places at the right times to get the help I needed from others.

I was helped by creative and compassionate teachers and professors who took an active interest in me, pushed me to succeed, and helped me to do so. They helped me develop a work ethic and the skills necessary to succeed as a lawyer.

I was helped by trustworthy and supportive colleagues who aided me in navigating the choices in my career, providing advice and counsel at each turning point. They helped lay the foundation for my network and showed, by way of example, how to combine a career with public service.

I was helped by mentors and partners who guided me and supported me both in and

out of the law. They set an example of lawyering with integrity and respect. They acted as role models for what kind of lawyer I might become.

This is not an acceptance speech and it is not intended to be self-congratulatory—quite the opposite. It is a recognition that, in the baseball game of life, I was born on third base. I will never know how much harder I otherwise would have had to work to get to the same place or whether I would have succeeded in doing so had I not been so lucky. Thus, in simply being a young lawyer with a career and the soap box of my position as chair of the Young Lawyers Section, it behooves me to recognize all the privileges and people who helped me get where I am.

There are numerous and frequent opportunities available to provide help to young and future lawyers, such as informal mentoring and encouragement. All the major

bar associations in our state provide opportunities to participate in more formal mentoring programs. Further, the Connecticut Bar Association provides programs such as LAW Camp, the Pathways to Legal Careers Pipeline Program, and the Connecticut Court Visitation Program, which all help young students realize that the law is a potential career opportunity when they otherwise may not have been exposed to it or considered it as an option.

Each of us in this profession has an *obligation* to help other young lawyers and future lawyers make their way—and there is particular value in helping those who did not benefit from many of those unearned privileges. Every effort to do so helps to break down prejudice by unlocking potential that otherwise may have been stymied.

How many privileges did you benefit from? Who helped you? Who, in turn, will you mentor and help? ■



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