

Fund Finance Friday



FFA NextGen and Diversity Event – Cross-Border Relationships: A Journey in Diversity

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FFA NextGen and Diversity teams held a panel session this week on “Cross-Border Relationships: A Journey in Diversity.” Over 100 attendees tuned in to the discussion moderated by David Lammy, Member of Parliament for Tottenham and the Shadow Justice Secretary, with panelists Shani Unantenne, Executive Director, Financial Institutions Europe at ANZ; Valery Nformba, Solicitor at Macfarlanes LLP; Wol Kolade, Managing Partner at Livingbridge; and Yomi Akinyemi, Director at Wells Fargo. Read on for some key takeaways.

Be Conscious of the Experiences of Your Diverse Colleagues

- Panelists talked about not bringing their true authentic self in their early careers and wished to spread the message to “stay true to yourself” because our diversity is what makes everyone unique.
- See our color. Do not say, “I don’t see color” – because our color is positive, and it is what makes us unique. Imposter syndrome is real, and diverse colleagues face exceptional pressures when they’re the only person in the room who looks different.
- We must all open our eyes to the existing systems that uphold racism. There are no “innocent” microaggressions.

Advice and Takeaways

- The question is not, “Are we going to progress?” but rather, “*How quickly* are we going to progress from where we are today?” The train has left the station with the discussion on gender equality, so the only place we can end is equality for all. The debate is how long will it take for us to get there.
- Despite the sentiment, “Hard work will get you everything,” no one is able to prepare you for what to do when you get in the door. Allies, advocates, mentors and reverse mentor relationships are critical.
- For junior colleagues: find confidence with where you are. There is a pressure to change, and firms are being forced to grapple with this. Recognize that you are part of the solution.
- We must acknowledge that our behaviors and culture are at the core of where we are today, and we must continue having these conversations to raise such awareness.
- Education is key. Leadership has to embrace and live it, but the employees have to believe it.

The Bottom Line – Change Is for Now

- Diversity, equity and inclusion must remain a priority – this is something everyone should want, and this builds powerful organizations that will thrive in the future.
- Be transparent and honest of where you are.
 - As an individual, don’t be afraid of saying the wrong thing – this is an ongoing education process and you can continue to improve.
 - As a firm, look at your own team, and if your team doesn’t reflect society, take ownership to push for change.

- The progress to change is hard, continuous work. There is still so far to go, but starting is the first step.

The panel also noted that it is not good enough to not be racist; rather, we need to be actively anti-racist. The Diversity Committee will look to continue this conversation soon.