



Podcast Transcript

Celebrating Black Voices at BakerHostetler: A Path with Purpose

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Kattman: In recognition of Black History Month, we're spotlighting three attorneys from within our various practice groups through our podcast series, Celebrating Black Voices at BakerHostetler. As we learn more about these attorneys, we will also discuss top issues and changes in their respective area of law, and how they are making strides in their practices. I'm Amy Kattman, and you're listening to BakerHosts.

On today's episode of Celebrating Black Voices at BakerHostetler, our guest is Ava Claypool. Ava is an associate in our Los Angeles office in our Labor and Employment Practice Group, and is also a member of the Black Affinity Group. Welcome to the show, Ava!

Claypool: Hi, thanks. Happy to be here.

Kattman: Ava, to begin, could you tell us what drew you to focus your practice on Labor and Employment?

Claypool: Yeah. It was not intentional. I kind of fell into it. We had a happy hour event at the LA office, and after a few drinks, it was me and a couple partners and associates, and I was explaining to this partner, Shareef Farag, that I'm busy but I could be busier, I'm willing to take on more work. And he is like, well I'm in Labor and Employment, we have work but we're not really good at sharing associates, so if you want work I can give it to you, but it is going to be a lot. And sure enough, I think, within months it was probably 90% of the work that I had, and I found that I liked it a lot, actually. I thought the single plaintiff cases were the perfect mixture of the drafting and disputes that I liked in typical litigation, but on a much faster

timeline and with a lot of more interesting facts to me, at least. And so, within the next six months to a year I fully transitioned into the Labor and Employment Practice Group. So, fully because of Mr. Farag.

Kattman: What a good story.

Claypool: Yeah.

Kattman: Ava, giving back to the community is an important aspect of BakerHostetler. Are you involved in any initiatives to help raise awareness in the community or support diverse talent in your area of practice?

Claypool: Well, yeah. So, I'm both on the hiring committee and I am the vice chair of the diversity committee in the LA office. So, with the hiring committee, I am able to go out to local law schools and speak directly with diverse talent, which is nice. We do a lot of tabling events, and then I also am able to interview a lot of diverse talent just during OCI, which is great. I like to be able to tell them my story and hear those stories too. And on the diversity committee, we actually recently created a new outreach subcommittee so that we can focus solely on reaching out to diverse talent in the community. So, it is something that is really important to me.

Kattman: Absolutely. Mentorship is a key part of professional development at a law firm. What do you see as the primary benefits of a mentor-mentee relationship?

Claypool: So, I've had really great mentors throughout my career. I clerked, so one of the judges that I clerked for, he's been a great mentor. He actually just called me yesterday. I mean it's been years since I clerked there, but we still have such a great relationship. And even now, Mr. Farag is my mentor at the firm. And I think for me as a first-generation lawyer, I didn't meet a lawyer until college, and so you create images of successful people in your head, these people that you want to be like. But having them as mentors really humanizes the success to me, and just gives you a vision of, not the image you created, but what it really looks like to be a lawyer, or to be a judge, or to be a partner. And so, for me at least that is the most important benefit in my mentor-mentee relationships.

Kattman: Ava, as one final question, I'd like to know what inspires you, and what advice you can give to other up-and-coming lawyers.

Claypool: So, I like to separate my inspirations into two buckets. So, I have positive inspirations and then I have some kind of negative, I guess you would say, inspirations. So, my positive inspiration for sure is my family. Like I said, I'm a first-generation lawyer and so for a lot of my older family members they tell me, honestly, you're living out one of my wildest dreams. And so, hearing that inspires me. My parents inspire me, my siblings, I mean, just having people in your corner inspires me. To know I can do this, they believe I can do this, and I'm doing it for them. And honestly, I kind of inspire myself. I think looking back on all of the roadblocks and obstacles I've had to go through to get here is inspiring to know okay, I got through that. So, whatever it is that I'm struggling with now, I am

sure I can get over it as well. And then, of course, people who have come before me, the Thurgood Marshalls. Michelle Obama is probably my biggest, at least legal, inspiration. I love her and I want to be just like her. And then negative inspiration is just people who have told me that I couldn't do it, or that I shouldn't be a lawyer, I couldn't be a lawyer, or I couldn't get to big law, or whatever it is. It inspires me to just keep going. It just, pure spite honestly.

So, to the last part of your question, what would I tell up-and-coming lawyers. Just to keep working. People are going to tell you what is difficult or what you shouldn't do, but I think you know what you want and as long as you know what you want, and you have pretty strong set intentions you can really get there.

Kattman: Well, Ava, you, and certainly your story, is an inspiration to us. Thank you.

Claypool: Thank you. Thank you for having me.

Kattman: If you have any questions for Ava, her contact information is in the show notes. As always, thanks for listening to BakerHosts.

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