

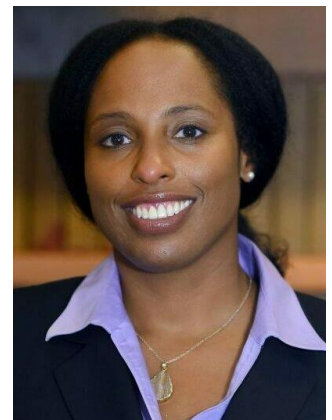
Kramer Levin's New CDO On Why She Returned To BigLaw

By **Aebra Coe**

Law360 (September 8, 2021, 12:19 PM EDT) -- Nada Llewellyn, Kramer Levin's new chief diversity and inclusion officer, says she jumped from higher education to a law firm for the opportunity to address some of the concerns she had as a Black woman working as an associate at a large law firm earlier in her career.

Llewellyn joined the firm in July from St. John's University, where she was chief diversity officer, associate vice president for human resources and deputy general counsel.

In an interview with Law360 Pulse, Llewellyn discussed her motivation for taking on the role — which is a new one at Kramer Levin- — as well as her goals and strategies around improving diversity, equity and inclusion both at the firm and in the wider legal industry.



Nada Llewellyn

What drew you to working in a law firm as opposed to another workplace?

I started my legal career in a large law firm where I practiced for about five years before going in-house. So I practiced both in-house and in a law firm setting before taking on more responsibilities, including becoming chief diversity officer at my previous employer. I thought this was a really wonderful opportunity to bring the learning and understanding I now have to address some of the concerns I had as a Black woman. As an attorney in a large law firm, I personally encountered feelings of exclusion, feeling not being seen.

I don't know that I would have gone to any law firm. It was really meeting the people at Kramer Levin and hearing about their dedication and the work they're doing in the DEI space that drew me. It felt like a place where I could do good work and make a difference for generations to come, in collaboration with a lot of people who are invested in ensuring it becomes more equitable and inclusive.

What insights and skills are you able to bring with you to the role from your previous job in an academic setting?

For me, starting in higher education ensured that my approach to diversity, equity and inclusion was grounded in theoretical and pedagogical foundations for social justice education. I consider myself to be first and foremost a social justice practitioner. As articulated by Dr. Lee Anne Bell, the editor and author of *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, the goal of social justice is full and equitable participation of

people in all social identity groups in a society that is mutually shaped to address their needs. That's my goal, both personally and professionally, and that's the spirit I'll bring to my work at Kramer Levin.

Starting in higher ed has given me the opportunity to both research and practice, but also teach, understand how to teach ways we can be more inclusive and honor each other's humanity.

A number of law firms now have a chief diversity officer for the first time ever, including Kramer Levin. What challenges and opportunities are there for professionals who are filling these roles for the first time?

It's starting to develop an infrastructure, getting to know the law firm's culture, aligning with the mission, the goals of the firm. For me, specifically at Kramer Levin, my goal is to build on the foundation that was created by our chief legal talent officer [who previously served as the firm's diversity director]. There's been a lot of success we've had that I'm looking to grow.

Ultimately, whether it's my goals at Kramer Levin or that of other CDOs, it's really looking to solidify inclusion efforts and advocacy on behalf of minoritized people, both within our firm and then in the legal profession as a whole.

You said you'll be building on an existing foundation and trying to grow that. Can you tell me in concrete terms what that means?

It's about looking at how we recruit, what our retention efforts are, and how we can create a more inclusive culture throughout the firm. How do we enhance and demonstrate efforts to improve diversity and inclusion. Specifically it's looking at pipelines and broadening them, and it's really working to make sure everyone at Kramer Levin feels that we are committed to them and are invested in their success.

Are there any innovations in the diversity and inclusion space that are being applied elsewhere, for example higher education to corporations, that could be applied in a law firm setting?

We have to really understand how to assess the effectiveness of the programming we offer. We might offer a DEI or sensitivity training annually, but if we're not assessing the effectiveness of it, we're not able to demonstrate with data that we're taking the tangible measures necessary to create true, lasting change.

Another positive development is that there's a growing understanding that measures taken to increase diversity, equity and inclusion lead to workplaces that are better for all attorneys regardless of social identity, which results in better advice to and enhanced representation of our clients.

Are there any issues right now, especially with the pandemic, that law firms need to watch out for when it comes to diversity and inclusion?

I certainly think the pandemic has impacted everyone in profound ways. There can be disparate impacts on diverse attorneys, and by diverse I mean both women and racially diverse attorneys. That's something we have to be mindful of through continued engagement, support for mental health, and being really thoughtful about the ways that we return to the office. That's something we've been particularly attentive to at Kramer Levin — making sure anything we institute is going to be paying attention to matters of inclusion, making sure we're addressing the needs of all populations, and really embracing input from our community members to come up with solutions that will work for all of us.

And maybe we can come back stronger in serving clients and in making Kramer Levin an attractive, wonderful place to continue to work.

What do you love most about your job?

I love it when I'm able to connect with people and help them to think about a policy or practice in a different way. I like to see that light go on, because that's that human connection that's really at the heart of this work. Obviously the policies, procedures, practices and strategies are critical, but at its center it's the ability to see each other's humanity. And that to me is beautiful.