

New Jersey Law Journal

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Senwan Akhtar

"My experience has been that most clients and attorneys I work with are less focused on the fact that I am a diverse attorney and more interested in how I can assist them in achieving their legal and business goals."

By **Senwan Akhtar** | October 30, 2019



Senwan Akhtar, with Greenbaum Rowe Smith & Davis.

Over the past two years, Senwan Akhtar, counsel to Greenbaum Rowe Smith & Davis in Iselin, has served as lead counsel on numerous multi-million-dollar real estate transactions, including her representation of a real estate development firm in connection with the \$60 million sale of a 1,000-unit apartment complex, and

“regularly manages teams of attorneys who work in different departments ... since the transactions that Senwan handles involve not only corporate and real estate issues, but also other aspects of law,” a colleague said. She also serves as outside general counsel to clients and is active in various professional groups.

What are your proudest professional achievements over the last couple of years?

I am proud to have earned the confidence and trust of my clients to such a degree that they ask me to represent them on transactions that are of critical importance to their businesses. For instance, I recently represented a client on a \$15 million leveraged recapitalization and corporate restructuring transaction. In doing so, I assisted the client in the implementation of its business succession plan involving the retirement and buyout of a founding shareholder and the simultaneous buy-in of two senior executives. I represented another client in its \$56 million acquisition of a 300-unit luxury apartment complex consisting of 30 buildings located on a 46-acre site. In the course of this representation, I negotiated a multi-party joint venture agreement, and I assisted the client in structuring the transaction in a manner that avoided a potential \$1 million tax liability.

What has been your experience with diversity in the profession, and how does it factor in to your day-to-day work as an attorney?

I have certainly faced subtle and unsubtle biases throughout my career. Fortunately, however, my experience has been that most clients and attorneys I work with are less focused on the fact that I am a diverse attorney and more interested in how I can assist them in achieving their legal and business goals.

What can organizations employing lawyers do to better address diversity?

Organizations should develop relationships with minority and affinity bar associations, which can be sources to recruit diverse attorneys. They can also develop initiatives to strengthen and advance diversity and inclusiveness within their organizations. For example, I am actively involved in the Diversity Committee at my law firm, Greenbaum, Rowe Smith & Davis. Through these initiatives, organizations

can create opportunities for networking and mentoring to assist diverse attorneys, and they can develop mechanisms to ensure that diverse attorneys are getting good training, increased responsibility and complex work assignments. It is also important for organizations to strive to include diverse attorneys in management and leadership roles.

Name a mentor, or someone you admire, and why.

My mentors are my parents who left the comfort of their native countries and immigrated to the United States as teenagers over 50 years ago to pursue undergraduate and graduate studies. They were great role models who treated each other with respect, treated me and my three brothers equally, and instilled in us a strong work ethic and a desire to succeed. They taught us to be well-rounded individuals by exposing us to a diverse range of learning environments that included not only traditional classroom instruction, but also sports, art, music, and world travel.

What is your best advice for someone looking to make an impact in the legal profession?

First and foremost, you must become an expert in your field by continuously learning, staying on top of legal developments, and seeking out opportunities to represent clients on a wide variety of transactions. In addition, by seeking out professional leadership roles, you can make an impact on the legal community at large. I am proud to have served in leadership roles in the Middlesex County Bar Association and the New Jersey State Bar Association for almost a decade, where I have lead initiatives that have assisted in the professional growth of other lawyers in New Jersey.

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