

Diversity Dialogue Interview with Doreen Hanley by Kim Stephens 11/12/19

- John Caher: Welcome to Amici, News and Insight from the New York Judiciary and the Unified Court System. I'm John Caher. Today we're turning the mic over to Kim Stephens of the Office of Workforce Diversity for a Diversity Dialogue interview with Doreen Hanley, the Chief Clerk of the New York City Family Court.
- Kim Stephens: Thank you, Doreen, for joining us this afternoon to speak about your court career for our Diversity Dialogue series.
- Doreen Hanley: Thank you for inviting me, It's my pleasure.
- Kim Stephens: So, Doreen, can you tell us a little bit about your current position with the court system?
- Doreen Hanley: My current title is Chief Clerk of the New York City Family Court. I am the highest ranking non-judicial employee within the Family Court citywide.
- Kim Stephens: Wow! That's a major undertaking, a lot of responsibility.
- Doreen Hanley: Quite a bit, yes.
- Kim Stephens: So, how would you define diversity?
- Doreen Hanley: My definition of diversity would include perspective inclusion.
- Kim Stephens: By that, do you mean inclusion of all employees and their different perspectives in what they bring to the court system work environment?
- Doreen Hanley: Correct, as well as sensitivity with the ability to acknowledge and embrace those with different cultural backgrounds.
- Kim Stephens: Can you share with us your cultural background, and I also would like to ask how does it, if it does at all, influence your current position?
- Doreen Hanley: My mom is an African American. My dad is of Panamanian descent. My parents taught me the importance of work ethic. Diligence, it was a requirement to be persistent and sensitive with others because my parents came from two totally different walks of life. They were able to raise us in such a positive, welcoming environment. When I say us, I'm referring to my family. I have 12 siblings.
- Kim Stephens: Wow.
- Doreen Hanley: Nine brothers and three sisters. My dad worked two jobs for 37 years and he turned 91 years of age three days ago, and I'm very appreciative for his rearing.

Kim Stephens: How would you say you encourage others to honor their uniqueness?

Doreen Hanley: By embracing it. By informing others of what your uniquenesses are.

Kim Stephens: Wonderful. Now what are some types of inclusion programs or events that you or others in your court help to facilitate and what would you recommend for our organization to facilitate?

Doreen Hanley: In the Family Court, we strive for the core values set in our Strategic Plan. One of the most inclusive core values is "Respect." If we're able to respect everyone no matter who they are and where they're from, we have successfully met the goal. We will share our commitment towards everyone equitably and in fairness.

Kim Stephens: I think that's wonderful. Yes. We need to foster an environment where everyone feels comfortable to share their backgrounds, their culture, their ideas and their perspectives.

Doreen Hanley: That's correct.

Kim Stephens: So, I would like to ask you a little bit more about your career path. What do you enjoy most about your job?

Doreen Hanley: The interaction. The different individuals I've had the privilege to meet and work with. This interaction has afforded me the opportunity to discuss, review and promote the uniqueness of the Family Court. However, I started my career in the NYC Criminal Court. So, coming into the Family Court was quite different for me but I seem to have found my place here. My reason for being here is to foster a positive interaction between our court and our communities.

Kim Stephens: As you were transitioning from Criminal Court to Family Court, did you have a mentor to guide you through the Family Court process and navigate in that arena?

Doreen Hanley: Yes, I've had many who played a role but at this level, it would be Judge Ruiz and Judge Jolly as mentors. Their accomplishments in the Family Court are admirable. I look forward to much more in the Family Court.

Kim Stephens: That's great. For someone listening to this podcast or possibly reading the transcript, what would you tell them about working for the court system?

Doreen Hanley: The court system afforded me the opportunity to advance in my career and the ability to have an impact within the community, not just within any community, but the entire NYC overall.

Stephens: You've been with the court system for many years, how many years is that exactly?

Doreen Hanley: 31 years.

Kim Stephens: How were you initially attracted to come and work for the court system?

Doreen Hanley: That's an interesting question. My introduction to the court system was a fluke. After graduating from college, I was looking for employment, but really didn't have any idea what I wanted to do. My high school was fashion industry, so I thought I wanted to be a designer. But my dad introduced me to a rude awakening. He brought home three newspapers and there was absolutely nothing in the help ads for a designer. He said, "Well I think you need to figure out what you're going to do."

So, I went back to a community college and after graduation [I] still [had] no idea what I want to do. I was talking to a friend and his mom who worked in the court system. She referred me to Varick Street. At that time Varick Street posted employment opportunities within the court. That was my introduction to the court system. I never thought about it prior to that.

Kim Stephens: As we move forward, the court system, we're trying to recruit or at least enhance the way that we do recruitment. What would you suggest is an ideal way for us to reach the masses and encourage them to come and work for the court system to see the beneficial and career growth that we have to offer?

Doreen Hanley: I would solicit individuals such as myself, who started in the entry level, to career days at schools, and I would host career days at the various courts. internships, more internships. Another means of introduction I feel is truly missing ... is the summer youth employment program. It is a very, very beneficial program I think for the inner-city youth.

Kim Stephens: Giving exposure to our court system.

Doreen Hanley: Absolutely. It's an introduction to the different titles, different positions, different assignments and the different courts. So many of our youth view the court as an overall place of some sort of punishment so, they have a tendency of staying away from the court, which is unfortunate because the consideration of a career path is overlooked. It becomes a place to stay away from.

I'll never forget, before starting in the court, I told my dad that I was going to be working for the court and he said, "Doing what? How are you going to punish people?" I said, "I'm not going to punish anyone."

Kim Stephens: We seem to have this negative connotation when we speak about the courts. Usually people don't mention the courts unless they have a case that they're filing.

Doreen Hanley: That's correct.

Kim Stephens: But yes, there are many career opportunities.

Doreen Hanley: Absolutely. And I must tell you coming out of high school... I don't ever recall hearing anything about the courts, ever, including graduating college I don't recall anything promoting the courts.

Kim Stephens: I think moving forward we're starting to embrace the idea of social media, because that is a popular tool being used, especially, by young people.

Before you leave this position, what would you like your greatest achievements to be?

Doreen Hanley: I would like to continue to promote diversity. In my 31 years, I've witnessed the transition that's taking place at this time. So, if I can see that it continues to grow, that will be something I would like to be a part of my legacy. Then I would like to see a visibility of fairness, and what I mean by that is just more of an acceptance for diversity. Diversity is growth, growth for those who may be excluded, and growth in recognition.

When I first came in the court, the court officers were predominately men. The judges were predominantly men. The support magistrates were women. It was a segregated system. I did not see a representation of every community.

Kim Stephens: Well, I have to say it has been a pleasure speaking with you and hearing your points of view regarding diversity and inclusion and also sharing your ascension in the court system, in your court career.

John Caher: Thanks for listening to Amici. You find all of our recent podcasts on the court system's website@www.nycourts.gov. And most are also in the iTunes podcast library. If you have a suggestion for an Amici podcast, please let me know. I'm John Caher and I can be reached at 518-453-8669 or jcaher@nycourts.gov. In the meantime stay tuned.