

# A Strong Sense of Belonging

An Interview with Rachael Gibson, Director, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Marcum LLP

**EDITORS' NOTE** Rachael Gibson is Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion at Marcum LLP. She became the first person to hold this newly-created leadership position in 2020 as Marcum formalized its DEI Initiative as a policy priority for the firm. Her mission is to raise awareness and help foster a culture that is both diverse and inclusive and that encourages and enables all associates and partners to be successful in their careers. Gibson has had a long career in management consulting, specializing in change management; diversity, equity and inclusion; leadership development; and strategic planning. In addition, she has developed and led numerous national initiatives for clients focused on a variety of leadership and change management issues. She has spoken at national conventions and conferences for organizations including BoardSource, the T. Rowe Price Foundation, and the Texas Council on Family Violence. She serves as an adjunct professor at the Chicago School for Professional Psychology, where she teaches graduate students interested in the field of consulting and organizational development. She also serves on two nonprofit boards of directors.



Rachael Gibson

*middle-market companies and high-net-worth individuals achieve their goals. Marcum offers industry-focused practices with specialized expertise to privately held and publicly registered companies, and nonprofit and social sector organizations. Through the Marcum Group, the firm also provides a full complement of technology, wealth management, executive search and staffing, and strategic marketing services. Headquartered in New York City, Marcum has offices in major business markets across the U.S. and select international locations.*

*Marcum is committed to the advancement of diversity, equity and inclusion. The firm is a founding member of LEA Global and is the exclusive U.S. partner firm of ECOVIS International.*

**Will you provide an overview of your role and key areas of focus?**

I lead Marcum's DEI policies, programs, and services across the firm, which involves working with the firm's leaders and associates to ensure that Marcum continues to be a diverse firm where all associates feel a strong sense of belonging and see pathways to leadership opportunities.

**What excited you about the opportunity to join Marcum and made you feel it was the right fit?**

I joined Marcum via the Raffa PC merger in 2018. Joining a national firm of Marcum's scope has

allowed me to have a broad and deep impact in the realm of DEI. I work alongside bright and passionate people every single day. I don't spend a lot of time "making the case for DEI" here at Marcum. Partners and associates at all levels embrace what we're doing in our DEI programs and initiatives and are willing to roll up their sleeves to do the hard work that's needed to truly live these values.

**Will you provide an overview of Marcum's diversity, equity and inclusion strategy?**

Marcum's DEI strategy is centered around three key priority areas: 1) Attracting a diverse talent pool at all levels; 2) Fostering a culture of inclusion where all associates feel a strong sense of belonging at work; and 3) Ensuring that associates from underrepresented groups experience pathways to leadership.

**How engrained is diversity and inclusion in Marcum's culture and values?**

Although my role is new, diversity and inclusion is not a new concept for Marcum. We're formalizing existing policies and building upon a foundation that was birthed many years ago. For instance, Marcum has always been a place that supported women in the workplace. We were one of the first firms to embrace alternative work schedules to enable our female professionals to stay on the partner track while they were raising their families. We have associates who represent all races, generations, and sexual identities. Marcum was also the first national firm in the U.S. to establish a Modern Family practice dedicated to serving the unique

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tax, trust and estate, and financial planning needs of the LBTBQ+ community. While we do have much progress to make in terms of continuing to diversify our firm’s leadership, I am confident that we will get there. We have an incredibly diverse pipeline of future leaders and we’re seeking ways to continue to develop and support them, including those from underrepresented groups.

Over the past few months, we have explicitly talked about the idea that we do not shed our identities when we come to work – a lesson that solidified during COVID while we were all working remotely. As a result, we have started to engage in firm-wide conversations that have begun to normalize talking about issues related to race, gender, caregiving status, and other nuanced personal issues, and it is fostering a stronger sense of belonging in parts of our firm. Our associate resource groups, which are affinity groups for associates with shared interests, cultures, lifestyles, and abilities, have also strengthened over the past year and we’re seeing that inclusion and belonging is permeating many aspects of the firm.

I have also seen some very powerful examples of allyship among associates and partners. Many people are using their spheres of influence to create meaningful change, from ensuring that our marketing materials are representative of the diversity that exists within the firm and broader society, to initiating conversation about developing scholarship funds for

college students from underrepresented groups. Culture is about everybody doing their part to live our DEI values and I see amazing examples of this every single day.

**How do you engage your employees in Marcum’s diversity efforts?**

Our efforts are very associate-driven. I am in close communication with the leaders of our various associate resource groups (ARGs). They help to determine how best to acknowledge and elevate the voices of our diverse associates. We have a national DEI Task Force and a national DEI steering committee, as well as regional DEI committees whose role it is to advance DEI programs in their offices. I also meet with any associate who wants to share an idea and I do my best to help advance these. Perhaps most impactfully, we are having numerous firm-wide DEI conversations. Many of the questions that come from those conversations are incorporated into our programming. For instance, during our firm-wide conversation where we discussed race, many of our associates asked what they can do to be allies to their diverse colleagues. As a result, we used the month of April to host firm-wide allyship education sessions.

**Is it critical to have metrics in place to track the impact of Marcum’s diversity and inclusion efforts?**

Absolutely. I live by the saying “if it doesn’t get tracked, it doesn’t get done.” We want to evaluate

our efforts and know whether or not we’re moving the needle and how we need to adjust. Tracking also helps us be targeted in our approach.

**How critical is it to have the commitment of Marcum’s management team in its diversity, equity and inclusion efforts?**

A DEI program cannot be successful without the buy-in and active participation of leadership. Our leadership is well aware of this. Our CEO, Jeffrey Weiner, and COO, Ronald Storch, serve on our national DEI committees – one of which meets every two weeks. These committees are comprised of partners across the firm. I work closely with partners across the firm, many of whom are strong allies and active advocates for issues related to DEI.

**What are your key priorities as you look to build on Marcum’s diversity and inclusion efforts?**

My key priority is simple – I want DEI values to be in the DNA of our firm. I view my role as a facilitator. I want our associates and partners to all feel that they have a role to play in walking the talk when it comes to DEI. I basically want shared leadership in this work.

Finally, I want to play a role in giving our associates from underrepresented groups hope – hope that they, too, can be their best and whole selves at Marcum. I want them to love coming to work, not only because they are skilled practitioners, but because they feel a strong sense of belonging. ●

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