



Job Title: Partner
Education: LLM, Georgetown University Law Center; JD, Boston College Law School; BA, Spelman College
Company Name: Venable LLP
Industry: Legal
Company CEO: Stuart P. Ingis (Firm Chair)
Company Headquarters Location: Washington, DC
Number of Employees: 1,500+
Words you live by: You define your career through perseverance.
Personal Philosophy: Your character speaks volumes.
What book are you reading: American Spy by Lauren Wilkinson
What was your first job: Summer camp counselor
Favorite charity: March of Dimes
Interests: Community service
Family: Husband and two young children

No One Should Be “the Only One”

I am a partner at Venable LLP, a national law firm, where I focus on employee benefits and executive compensation. I advise both private and public employers on all types of retirement plans, along with health and welfare plans and executive compensation arrangements.

After five years with the Internal Revenue Service, Office of Chief Counsel, one of my primary goals when I began looking to join private practice was not to be “the only one”—the only woman, the only minority, the only African American in the room. I specifically chose Venable because it has a reputation as a firm where a person’s ethnicity is not a factor that will inhibit success.

As an African American attorney with few peers in my industry, I have found that the journey to becoming partner at a major law firm is not always smooth. I made a determination early in my career, however, to focus on perfecting the craft of lawyering. By persisting with the work and striving for excellence, I was able to get exposure; this allowed me to grow my client base and forge lasting relationships that advanced my practice. In fact, a long-term client advocated for me to be promoted to partner and, more important, created

opportunities for me as she advanced in her own career.

I serve as co-head of Venable’s Diversity and Inclusion Initiative, and as chair of the Venable Success Network (VSN), the firm’s African American affinity group. Through my work with VSN, I have made it my personal goal to cultivate and retain African American talent. To this end, we have conducted in-depth training to help minority associates develop the personal and professional skills necessary for their elevation to partner. The Initiative is focused on creating a firm-wide strategy for minorities, LGBTQ, and women.

Recently, the Initiative brought in a consultant to conduct implicit-bias and inclusion training for all firm leaders, as well as for lawyers who work on firm committees related to hiring and retention. I think that the Initiative’s work will really move Venable to the next level on diversity and inclusion efforts.

Although African Americans are still underrepresented at the partnership level across law firms, we are making strides. My hope is that one day no young attorney of color will ever have to worry about being “the only one.”