

Rutan & Tucker DEI Goes Far Beyond Box-Checking

Half of Irvine Firm's Attorneys Listed as Diverse

■ By KEVIN COSTELLOE

Rutan & Tucker LLP, the second-largest law firm based in Orange County, has crafted a maternity leave program that lets expectant mothers stay on partnership track as part of the firm's push for diversity, equity and inclusion.

Pregnant women get a 25% reduction in workload in the month before giving birth, with a 50% reduction the first month back to work, and an additional 25% reduction during the second month back.

"It's optically unnoticeable," said Rutan Partner **Ashley Vernick**, since many people aren't even aware of the reduced hours that allow a reintegration into work.

She said, "it allows women to stay on the normal path and trajectory to partnership without feeling the need to take a step back in hours and holding themselves back from promotion."



Ashley Vernick
Partner, DEIC
Co-Chair
Rutan & Tucker



Vijay Pai
Partner, DEIC
Co-Chair
Rutan & Tucker

One result: the number of women partners at Rutan has jumped 51% since 2018.

Rutan has woven DEI programs into the firm's fabric to be sure that everyone is included.

"Diversity is not just you need to be diverse," said Vernick, the co-chair of the firm's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee. "It's you being connected to other diverse individuals and learning their background and learning how they think, and engaging with them."



Rutan & Tucker promotes diversity, equity and inclusion in numerous ways

RUTAN

TOP FIRM FOR DIVERSITY

Rutan has been recognized by The American Lawyer as one of the top firms for Diversity in 2023.

THE AMERICAN LAWYER
2023 DIVERSITY SCORECARD
A TOP FIRM FOR DIVERSITY
RUTAN & TUCKER LLP

Rutan & Tucker cited for diversity work

The **American Lawyer** magazine named Rutan & Tucker a top firm for diversity this year.

The company has been selected for inclusion in the Business Journal's inaugural **Embracing Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Special Report**.

Retention, Promotion

"We have a lot of programs for retention, promotion which ties into the equity and

inclusion aspect of DEI," Vernick told the Business Journal on June 26.

She is a 2011 graduate of the **University of Chicago Law School** and works in Rutan & Tucker's headquarters at the Boardwalk office development along Jamboree Road, near John Wayne Airport.

Vernick is an experienced litigator, known to her clients not just as their lawyer, but also their consultant, touching all facets of their business. Her wide-ranging practice areas

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include contract and business disputes, employment matters, insurance coverage and real estate.

The other co-chair of the diversity committee is **Vijay Pai**, the head of the firm's Real Estate Section and a graduate of the **Columbia University School of Law** in New York.

Pai is a member of the board of **Youth Employment Services Inc.** and the **South Asian Bar Association**.

With 147 lawyers firmwide Rutan & Tucker is second only to **Knobbe Martens** with 284 as of February in the OC law firm size rankings, by attorney headcount. Most of Rutan's lawyers are in Irvine, though it has also expanded to Palo Alto, San Francisco and Scottsdale, Ariz.

Rutan's other DEI projects include a "diverse mentoring program" pairing together a partner and an associate from different practice areas to ensure there is no boss-subordinate dynamic.

Programs Succeeding

Rutan points out the DEI work has been succeeding.

The firm says just over two-thirds of its associates—36 in all—are classified as "diverse."

The category "diverse" includes female, Asian, those of two or more races, Hispanic/Latino and African American/Black. Rutan is also in the process of starting to track veterans, people with disabilities and LGBTQ+.

Here is a breakdown of some other Rutan & Tucker statistics:

- Twenty-four of its 74 top-rung partners fall into the diverse category.
- Half of its 147 lawyers fall into the diverse category.
- Twenty-eight attorneys are participating in the DEI mentoring program this year.

Vernick noted that the programs are not limited to attorneys who self-identify or otherwise qualify as "diverse."

Rather, Vernick makes a proactive effort to reach out to all attorneys to encourage their participation, noting that participation by attorneys who do not qualify as diverse is critical in



Rutan & Tucker's HQ is at the Boardwalk office project in Irvine

embracing and fostering diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging within the firm.

'Diversity of Thought'

"For Rutan, diversity isn't just about a checked box, ethnicity or nationality or gender," diversity committee co-chair Vernick said.

She is a member of the **Orange County Bar Association Diversity Committee**, a board member of the **Orange County Hispanic Bar Association** and a member of **Orange County Coalition for Diversity in the Law**.

The firm also supports those groups and more, including the **Thurgood Marshall Bar Association**, connecting, supporting and increasing the Black legal community in Orange County. Rutan also supports the **Orange County Lavender Bar Association**, the official association of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and allied attorneys, judges, and law students.

"Diversity of thought is one of the things that we want to promote," Vernick said.

Rutan & Tucker LLP



- **FOUNDED:** 1955
- **HEADQUARTERS:** Irvine
- **PRACTICE:** corporate and tax, employment, government and regulatory, intellectual property, real estate, litigation and trial, land use and entitlement
- **ATTORNEYS:** 147 firmwide
- **NOTABLE:** awarded the Diversity Scorecard from The American Lawyer in 2023 as a top firm for diversity

The firm also runs implicit bias training and promotes mental wellness programs.

She said the various DEI groups and program participants are encouraged to provide feedback, which can be done confidentially.

"It's not that DEIC created these programs. DEIC was a manifestation of these programs, policies and mindsets that have been around forever," according to Vernick. ■