



PRISM

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MEET THE 2025-2026 DEIA TEAM



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FROM CORE TO CULTURE

THE LEADERSHIP JOURNEY

Leadership is more than a title. It is a journey that begins at the core of who we are and extends outward into the culture we create. For those of us in leadership roles, this journey requires reflection, intentionality, and courage. It is an opportunity to view the role through a leadership lens and embrace the responsibilities that come with it, even when it feels uncomfortable.

Reflection is the practice of pausing to examine not only what we do, but why we do it. For leaders, reflection means first looking inward to understand personal values, biases, and motivations. Then we need to consider how decisions impact individuals, teams, and the broader organization.

Lastly, we need to learn from successes and failures with humility and use those lessons to grow. Without reflection, leadership risks become reactive rather than purposeful. Reflection ensures that leaders remain grounded, self-aware, and aligned with the mission they serve.

Intentionality is about leading with clarity and purpose. It requires leaders to set deliberate goals that align with organizational values and long-term vision. Then, communicate decisions transparently, ensuring actions are consistent with stated priorities.

Equally important, leaders must create inclusive spaces by intentionally inviting diverse perspectives and voices into the conversation.

Intentional leadership avoids “going through the motions.” Instead, it ensures that every choice contributes meaningfully to building culture, advancing equity, and strengthening community.

Courage is the catalyst that transforms reflection and intentionality into action. For leaders, courage means speaking up when inequities or injustices are present, even when it is uncomfortable. We need to make bold decisions that challenge tradition or resist complacency.

Authentic leadership shines when we stand firm in values while navigating uncertainty, criticism, or resistance. Courageous leadership is not about fearlessness; it is about acting despite fear, with conviction and integrity. It is the willingness to lead change, even when the path forward is difficult.

Together, reflection, intentionality, and courage form the foundation of transformative leadership. Reflection keeps us grounded, intentionality keeps us focused, and courage propels us forward. When leaders embrace all three, they not only guide organizations but also shape cultures that are inclusive, resilient, and future-ready.

At the heart of inclusive leadership lies a commitment to values. Before policies, programs, or systems are made, what are the decisions? How do I ensure fairness, equity, and respect in every choice? Am I willing to challenge the status quo when it no longer serves inclusivity? These questions anchor us in our core, reminding us that leadership is less about authority and more about responsibility.

Culture is not written in handbooks; it is lived in daily interactions. As leaders, we have the unique opportunity to shape the chapter's culture by modeling collaboration, transparency, and empathy. When leaders demonstrate inclusivity in their actions, they set the tone for the entire organization.

Creating culture means building spaces where diverse voices are welcomed and valued, plus encouraging dialogue that bridges differences. There is no singular voice on any team.

Reflective, intentional, and courageous leadership is not about perfection; it's about owning who we have become throughout the leadership journey as we learn and evolve. When leaders demonstrate sincerity and authenticity and are committed to change, they not only grow personally but also inspire their teams to embrace accountability and continuous improvement.

From core to culture, the leadership journey is about aligning values with actions and ensuring that inclusivity is woven into the fabric of our organization. As leaders, we are called not only to guide, but to inspire—creating a culture where every member and business partner feels seen, heard, and empowered.

The journey is ongoing, but with clarity of values, intentional culture-building, and courageous leadership, we can move beyond systems to create a community that thrives, moves others, and has a lasting, powerful impact.

2025-2026 ALANYC Executive Committee



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BEING AN ALLY

STANDING STRONG OR ABANDONING SHIP

Allyship has become one of those words that carries weight before it carries meaning. In today's climate, which has become politically unstable, socially charged, and, for so many, emotionally exhausting, people hear the word "allyship" and often ask, "What does this require of me?" and "How much risk does this carry?"

For law firms, those questions feel especially acute. Firms operate in environments built on precedent, risk management, and client trust. The pressure is to get it right, but also to avoid controversy or survive the current landscape. In moments of uncertainty, that pressure can pull law firms into silence, to retreat or stay away from anything that feels remotely charged.

But allyship is not a slogan, a stance, or a line in a policy manual. It is the practice of noticing where there is systemic strain on people—and choosing to respond.

It is noticed, for example:

- Women still contend with systems not designed with them in mind,
- People of color carrying unequal burdens of visibility, scrutiny, or expectation,
- LGBTQ+ colleagues navigating whether visibility feels safe or costly,
- Introverts whose ideas surface only when space is made,
- Cognitively diverse employees managing spaces that reward one way of thinking,
- Colleagues with disabilities navigating access that others never have to consider,
- Staff from varying socioeconomic groups learning unwritten professional rules,
- At times, perhaps a colleague, who is overwhelmed, grieving, or struggling, chooses patience and flexibility over pressure.

At its core, allyship is about stepping in to support others through awareness, influence, and action when systemic strain or instability puts people at a disadvantage.

What Allyship Looks Like in the Office

Allyship in the law firm context is best understood not as a label or committee, but as everyday behavior that makes workplaces more equitable and resilient. It can look like:

- Pausing in meetings to ask whose perspective hasn't been shared,
- Making sure workloads, flexibility, and expectations are applied consistently,
- Ensuring policies protect people in practice, not just on paper,
- Amplifying contributions that might otherwise go unnoticed, and
- Offering flexibility when personal strain intersects with professional demands.

These actions are rooted in professionalism, mutual respect, and organizational effectiveness.

The Moment We're In

At the start of 2026, civic unrest across the United States has underscored how social and political issues intersect with workplaces. In Minneapolis, federal immigration enforcement operations known as Operation Metro Surge led to the fatal shootings of civilians Alex Pretti and Renée Good by federal immigration agents. Videos and reporting showed Pretti was unarmed when killed, prompting national outrage and large protests in Minneapolis, Chicago, New York City, and beyond. Community leaders and state officials called for investigations and changes to enforcement practices, and business leaders joined them in de-escalating.

For employees and administrators, these external tensions are not background noise. They affect focus, morale, psychological safety, and day-to-day interactions. Some leaders recognize that people carry the world into work; they are not necessarily holding a political stance, but carrying the human impact.

At the same time, the legal rules around workplace equity have been evolving. The Supreme Court decisions from 2025 confirmed that federal anti-discrimination protections apply broadly and that all employees must be treated equally under the law. Though law firms' responsibility to prevent discrimination remains unchanged, the environment surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion has grown more contentious. Twenty major law firms received letters from the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission seeking information about their DEI programs and related employment practices to determine whether they constitute potential civil rights violations. Many law firms found themselves navigating under this intensified political and legal pressure, balancing compliance and risk with the human impact of changes to their DEI commitments.

Standing Strong: Consistency Under Pressure

Some law firms have chosen to maintain or even reinforce visible commitments to fairness, inclusion, and equitable opportunities, even amid external uncertainty:

- Some firm leaders have issued internal messages acknowledging public tensions and reaffirming their commitment to a respectful and inclusive workplace culture,
- Several firms continue structured mentorship programs, affinity group support, and professional development focused on inclusive leadership,
- Administrators clarify expectations around respectful behavior and consistent application of policies, emphasizing that procedures must function fairly regardless of external conditions.

In some cases, firms have communicated that they will not eliminate programs or support for underrepresented or marginalized groups, citing professional values of fairness, client service quality, and commitment to a diverse talent pipeline. These choices reflect an understanding that allyship and equitable practice are not situational, but part of a firm's operational integrity.

Standing Strong or Abandoning Ship? More Like Quiet Continuity

Other firms have responded to external pressures by adjusting how they communicate without abandoning the substance of their actions:

- Some have renamed or reframed “DEI” pages to focus on “Belonging,” “Inclusive Leadership,” or “Professional Development,” while maintaining programs and mentorship structures that serve similar purposes.
- Several firms have reportedly continued internal affinity groups and professional networks even as public-facing language changes to remove specific terms.
- Others have chosen to leave internal structures intact but adjust external communications to emphasize compliance with law and equal opportunity, rather than specific diversity terminology.

In this approach, firms are not necessarily abandoning allyship practices. Instead, they are translating them into language and structures that reduce confusion or risk while still supporting employees. This dynamic reflects a practical reality: organizations may have more power in implementation. Allyship depends more on how people are treated than on labels.

Reduced Commitments

In some cases, these changes have included:

- Several firms have removed or rewritten DEI content on their websites and modified descriptions of pro bono and culture work, often replacing terms like “diversity” or “inclusion” with broader, neutral language such as “engagement” or “opportunity.”
- Deleting web pages explicitly focused on diversity, equity, or inclusion
- Removing references to social justice or related work from public pro bono descriptions
- Replacing statements about specific representation goals with general commitments to opportunity or professionalism

These changes often occur in response to regulatory or political pressure, rather than a complete abandonment of equitable practice. However, for employees the impact is real, sometimes creating an environment that feels uncertain or unstable, with ambiguity around the firm's values.

Why Law Firms Respond Differently

Firms that have stood strong tend to do so because they view allyship as integral to long-term culture, talent retention, client expectations, and professional standards, regardless of external rhetoric or regulatory pressure.

Firms that reposition language often do so out of concern about external risk, client perception, or regulatory scrutiny, particularly in a landscape where federal and state authorities are actively engaging with how workplace practices are described and documented.

How Allyship Manifests Day to Day

True allyship in law firms often happens in routine interactions:

- Correcting misattributed credit in meetings,
- Advocating for equitable work assignments,
- Ensuring reviews and promotions use fair criteria,
- Supporting colleagues during personal challenges, and
- Modeling respect when tension runs high.

These everyday actions signal fairness and stability and matter to employees at every level, including partners, associates, administrators, and staff.

Allyship Amid External Tension

External events, whether protests, policy changes, or legal decisions, can shape emotional landscapes. Allyship acknowledges that people are influenced by what happens beyond the office.

In response:

- Law firms can offer space for respectful dialogue,
- Administrators can reinforce support systems,
- Teams can recognize the impact of external stress on performance, and
- Policies can be clarified so fairness is not perceived as optional.

All of these actions help maintain trust and psychological safety, especially during tumultuous periods.

Choosing What We Stand For

“Standing strong” and “abandoning ship” are not abstract ideas or rhetorical choices. They are revealed in the decisions firms make when conditions become uncomfortable—in how policies are applied, how leaders communicate, and how people are treated when external pressures intensify.

Allyship, whether expressed through visible firm commitments, adjusted practices under new labels, or everyday acts that promote equity, is about consistently supporting colleagues, creating psychologically safe spaces, and embedding fairness into firm life, even when external tensions are high.

For law firms, where judgment, risk management, and credibility are foundational, allyship is not an optional overlay. It is part of institutional stewardship. The choices firms make under pressure shape trust, stability, and the resilience of their culture long after external tensions have passed. In that sense, allyship is not about signaling values—it is about sustaining the conditions that allow people, and organizations, to perform at their best when it matters most.



Gayatri Joshi

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INTENTIONAL INCLUSION

A CALL TO LEAD WITH PURPOSE (DO THE RIGHT THING)

In the legal industry, firm administrators analyze, interpret, and advise, hopefully with empathy and compassion. But when it comes to inclusion, we often rely on hope more than intention. Since we value justice, some expect that inclusion will naturally follow. Through DEIA training, we are reminded that inclusion, beyond being a reflection of good intentions, requires deliberate, consistent, and courageous action.

We have a unique opportunity to use our bird's-eye view of people, processes, and culture to practice intentional inclusion and create workplaces where everyone can contribute authentically.

Inclusion Is Not Accidental

Dr. D-L Stewart reminded us that diversity asks, "Who's in the room?" while Inclusion asks, "Have everyone's ideas been heard?" and "Is this environment safe for everyone to feel like they belong?" Intentional inclusion asks, "What are we doing every day to ensure that belonging is real?"

To answer this, we may need to slow down and notice:

- Who may speak up freely and who pauses out of self-doubt?
- Who receives the intricate projects and who gets the "office housework?"
- Who is invited into decision-making and who learns about decisions after the fact; and
- Who feels psychologically comfortable, and who feels they must self-edit all the time to avoid judgment?

These are the daily moments that shape lived experiences. And culture, more than any policy or program, determines whether people stay, grow, and thrive.

Why Inclusion Matters in Our Profession

Some qualities that shape the legal profession include trust, judgment, and the ability to see issues from multiple angles. Inclusive environments strengthen these. Intentional inclusion:

- Improves decision-making by reducing blind spots.
- Enhances client service by reflecting the diversity of the communities we represent.
- Supports retention in an industry where turnover is costly and disruptive; and
- Builds psychological safety, which fuels accuracy, collaboration, and innovation.

Clients are watching. Colleagues, including the next generation of lawyers and other legal professionals, are observing. Believe it or not, those impressionable family members are looking up to you and learning, too. Inclusion is no longer a “nice to have.” It is a crucial strategy. It’s a “whole vibe” (as the younger generation says).

I remember one of the first times I truly felt included at work. A Partner would hold a major case-related meeting. We’d learn about its origins, the client’s goal, and what each person in the meeting needed to do. Though I felt a bit intimidated at the time, sitting among lawyers, I was encouraged to ask questions pertaining to my eDiscovery duties. While the actions seemed small, especially since I was new to this legal world, the impact taught me how I want others to feel in meetings. This taught me that no matter your title, “You and your voice matter here.”

Leadership as a Daily Practice

Intentional inclusion is an advantageous tool or learned behavior that shows up in how we interact, offer genuine feedback, give credit, and in the responses, we receive when others are comfortable enough to express themselves without judgment. It takes humility, curiosity, and reflection on our own life habits. Leaders who practice intentional inclusion:

- ask whose perspectives are missing.
- encourage quieter voices in the conversation.
- explain the “why” behind decisions.
- share opportunities fairly; and
- model accountability when mistakes happen.

Practical Ways to Build Inclusive Environments

To make inclusion a deliberate habit, here are some intentional actions to consider:

- facilitate an organized meeting to avoid interruption and provide equal time to participate.
- reveal the rationale behind transparent decision-making.
- implement fair-play work systems that teach “how and why” and not just on the outcome.
- encourage mentorship and sponsorship that consciously support underrepresented professionals; and
- give feedback that prioritizes a culture of professional development and growth, not gatekeeping.

The Unique Role of Legal Administrators

All leaders are culture stewards. We influence hiring, onboarding, evaluations, and the firm's daily rhythms. We often spot inequities early and are uniquely positioned to support systems that foster fairness and inclusion.

While we may not control every decision, we shape the environment in which decisions are made, lending our voice and responsibility.

Dealing Through Barriers with Honesty and Courage

Inclusion work is not easy. There are fears that people will say the wrong thing, anxieties surrounding change fatigue, and thoughts of neutrality — that treating everyone “the same” is equivalent to treating everyone equitably. However, discomfort is an excellent sign that we are becoming more open to boldly holding each other and ourselves accountable. Intentional inclusion requires us to walk through that discomfort with compassion for ourselves and for others. It challenges us to lead with clarity, not perfection.

A Shared Responsibility and a Call to Action...This Week!

The practice of inclusion is not the sole responsibility of a single committee or leader. It is the collective responsibility of everyone who shapes others' experiences.

If you are reading this and want to ensure that you not only value inclusion but have the will to practice it intentionally, I have a challenge for you: What is one action you can take this week to make your environment more inclusive?

Inclusion only happens because leaders like you choose it again and again...and again. As legal administrators, we lead culture whether we intend to or not.

Some published work to consider:

- Inclusion on Purpose: An Intersectional Approach to Creating a Culture of Belonging at Work by Ruchika T. Malhotra
- From our own ALANYC DEIA Book Club – Inclusion Revolution: The Essential Guide to Dismantling Racial Inequity in the Workplace by Daisy Auger-Dominguez
- Dr. D-L Stewart's 2016 Lecture at the University of Illinois - “Minding the Gap: The Distance Between Compositional Diversity and Institutional Transformation”

Watch:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2aZYd3KmrkE>



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CAREER PATH AHEAD

FROM INTERN TO ATTORNEY

LIANNA DUMENG'S JOURNEY THROUGH LAW, MENTORSHIP, AND OPPORTUNITY - BUILDING A LEGAL CAREER, ONE PIPELINE AT A TIME

Interviewer's note:

In 2016, I got approval for my firm, Segal McCambridge, to begin participating as a host for the Thurgood Marshall Summer Law Internship Program. TMSLIP provides NYC public high school students with access to distinguished legal employers for a paid summer internship and professional development training. The program is part of the NYC Bar Association's continued efforts to strengthen the pipeline to the legal profession.

That first summer, I interviewed one of the interns, Lianna Dumeng, for PRISM to relate firsthand about the experience. She had just graduated from Forest Hills High School and was interested in studying law. By the end of the summer, we could tell she was a standout employee, so I recommended that she continue as an Office Services Clerk.

She stayed with us for a few years, becoming very familiar with litigation documents and procedures, while working around classes as she continued her studies. After she moved on, we kept in touch. I saw in recent LinkedIn posts that she had some big news, so it seemed high time to catch up again.

Matt: Great to see you, and congratulations on passing the bar and being admitted to the D.C. bar! I'm really interested in catching up with you. As you remember, we did an interview with PRISM a decade ago, and I'm still a big advocate for pipeline programs like TMSLIP, which brought you to our firm. We have continued to have interns every year since then, except for the summer of 2020 during the pandemic lockdown. After your internship, you were hired on and continued at the firm while you pursued a Paralegal Certificate, right?

Lianna: Right. I majored in Paralegal Studies at LaGuardia Community College while I was still at Segal McCambridge. The program was two years long, and I graduated with an associate's degree in 2018. That same year, I started at Baruch, majoring in Corporate Communications.

Matt: What were your plans as far as law school? I know you were interested in the law when you came to us—did you explore other areas or industries?

Lianna: Because my mom had a very successful career in the financial industry and Baruch is a very business-focused school, I was considering a business/finance route first.

Lianna: It was always in the back of my mind that I knew I wanted to be a lawyer eventually, but I felt I had to be sure because law school is such a big financial commitment. And so, after Segal, I went to work for Longwave Financial, a small financial advisory firm, starting as the front desk person there. I learned a lot about the financial industry there while I was attending Baruch—I would go to school on Tuesdays and Thursdays and then work Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. I decided I really liked the work the financial advisors were doing in client-facing roles, but I had no clue when they would talk to me about financial terms or account management—my eyes glazed over. I love the advisement part, but I knew the financial industry just wasn't for me.

Then I actually ended up relocating—this is a funny story. So, it was 2020, I was set to graduate from Baruch in the spring, and I was still working for Longwave Financial. My boyfriend at the time just started a job at AWS in Virginia, so I thought, "Okay, I will finish out my bachelor's degree, then I'll relocate and figure it out from there." I visited him on March 13, 2020. That's right, when everything shut down, so I got stuck in Virginia. I had a week's worth of clothes in my suitcase, and I ended up just moving to Virginia, and we've been here ever since. My (now) husband still works at AWS. In 2021, I was still working remotely for Longwave, still in Virginia, and I just had this nagging feeling like there's no better time than this very isolated moment to study for the LSAT. I was talking to my boss, who turned out to be a great mentor. I said I love working here, and I never want to leave, but I know there's nowhere for me to move up here, and I would regret it if I didn't at least try to go to law school.

Matt: How did your boss take it?

Lianna: She was very much like a mother figure to me, and she was very encouraging, saying: I am so sad to see you go, but also very excited to see the things that you're going to accomplish.

I actually couldn't get enough of the place, to the point that I even became a client. My mom still lives in Queens, so I still go to the city every six months or so, and I also meet up with people at Longwave.

Matt: Great! Those connections create your network organically—who knows where they'll go or where you'll go, and maybe you'll work together again in the future. When I was in grad school, I found the idea of networking daunting, but then I was told it's just creating a community of like-minded individuals. I thought, I can do that! When I work with students on presentation skills, I always ask them to identify key mentors—it's so revealing to share who helped you and how along the way. Obviously, we're all making it up as we go along, and it only seems like an inevitable narrative arc when you look back. The pandemic was such an upheaval, but it did give many people an opportunity to reevaluate what they wanted to do. So you studied for the LSAT. You said that financial terms made your eyes glaze over—were the legal terms and concepts more graspable?

Lianna: The legal terms came way easier. The LSAT was actually online, so I took it in my apartment, which was nice because it was a familiar environment. It was good and bad because then you're afraid of tech issues during this big exam, but I was so happy to be done with that. Once I got my score, I applied to schools to see what would happen. I wasn't sure whether I wanted to go back to New York for law school or stay in the DC area, so I applied to Fordham, St. John's, and several schools in the Washington area. I got into St. John's, and I got waitlisted at George Washington and Georgetown University and accepted to George Mason. I was shocked to have options. Then George Mason offered me a scholarship, so it was a no-brainer.

Matt: Is that where you are?

Lianna: Yes, I'm in Reston, Virginia, and the law school is in Arlington, only a 30-minute drive away. That was perfect, since most of the big law schools here are in DC, but I preferred this one to be in Virginia.

Matt: Did you go to school in person the whole time?

Lianna: Yes, it was fall 2022 when I started.

Matt: Did you know what you wanted to do in terms of a practice area, or were you open at that point? At any point, did you decide on a practice area or a focus?

Lianna: When I went into law school, I was still thinking that I had more of a business mindset, and I would be interested in corporate law. It's structured so that in the first year, you're doing all of the basic classes like Contracts and Property, which helped me to get my bearings in terms of figuring out what I liked. I liked Contracts as it's very straightforward. But I still wasn't sure about a practice area, and that's where internships helped a lot. I will say my school was a real culture shock because, coming from New York City, I was used to a very diverse environment. In my class, there were about 150 of us, and I could count on one hand the number of people of color in that group. I had never experienced that before. I also didn't know how intertwined law and politics were. But being in the nation's capital with a new administration, it was a whirlwind of debate. I remember literally going up to the Federalist Society at the club fair and being like, what is this?

I mean, I like the Constitution, we all do, we were in law school, right? Then I realized I felt more comfortable at the ACS—the American Constitution Society—where they would have diverse speakers such as transgender lawyers. It was a culture shock at that school. That's why I was drawn in when my school announced it had internships for diverse students. My first summer, I completed an intensive program where I learned all about telecommunications law, and I was placed at ACA Connects, a trade association

representing small- to midsize members who are Internet Service Providers. That was my first introduction to telecom law and the FCC. That's where I discovered I really like this niche—it felt like I could make it my own. It wasn't a supersaturated area, and every person I met was really nice, and that was the most important thing to me.

Matt: So, you had a program to get trained on the specific law to prepare you for a summer internship?

Lianna: It was a diversity pipeline program—which I'm now just realizing, I am a pipeline program girl, I guess! That program was just for the summer, which was great. In the second year of law school, the fall was insane because I was getting married that January, so I couldn't take on anything else. So, it was just school and marriage in the second year, and then my 2L summer was when I got my dream internship working in the office of Commissioner Starks at the Federal Communications Commission. That was my goal—to work at a commissioner's office where I could learn from the top down everything they did. It was vital for me because, during my time at ACA, I really liked the topics, but I didn't like the perspective I had to write from, since I agreed with many of the FCC's regulations and their public-interest aspect. I realized I really like government work—the way they draft regulations and do meaningful work that affects the entire nation.

Matt: So, where are you working now?

Lianna: I just started my first week at the DC Office of the Attorney General. It's so new, I haven't even posted it on LinkedIn yet.

Matt: Are you no longer working in the telecom sector?

Lianna: So, I applied to the FCC's Honors Attorney program, but then the government hiring freeze happened, and it flopped, and I was disappointed. Then my school's career services emailed me about this fellowship, an excellent opportunity to remain in the government sector and do important public-interest work. It's a fellowship—they bring recent newly-minted lawyers who have just passed the bar exam to do a fellowship, which is what I'm doing at the DC Attorney General's office. I'm working as an Assistant Attorney General there for a year to soak up all the experience I can, and then there's the understanding that I'll be moving on to something else after that. It could develop into a permanent position, but they can't guarantee that.

Matt: Did they give you an idea of how many continue?

Lianna: A couple of attorneys have continued there—it really does depend on the budget. It's expected you're going to go on to do something else.

Matt: After your year at the AG, if you're not staying, do you have an idea where you'd like to go?

Lianna: So, telecom law is definitely my biggest passion. I took a Space Law course in law school, and with everything that's going on with Starlink—it blew my mind to realize how new we are to all of these things and how few laws there are—little to none, because it's just international treaties. So, I'm really interested in hopefully getting into space law in the future.

Matt: Space Law—talk about a niche! I guess, as with any new technologies or new industries where there's no regulation because it didn't exist before, some people are trying to do as much as they can without regulation, like what's happening with AI. Space law, I've never heard of that. It sounds amazing!

Lianna: That's everyone's reaction when I tell them what I want to do! There are already thousands of satellites in space, and so far, it has been up to the FCC to say, "Hey, we need to do something about orbital debris. There's a big debate over whether they should be the agency to handle it, and it's so new that no one has really figured out how. I'm thankful we have the Space Bureau at the FCC. I'm hopeful that, over the next few years, there will be more space regulations.

Matt: Well, it's great to hear about your journey, plans, and prospects. Anything else you want to add about your future or where you are right now?

Lianna: Right now, I am soaking it all in. I still feel like that 17-year-old intern who started in Office Services at Segal, and I literally just got my own office today. I wasn't expecting it, so I am overwhelmed with the amount of space I have.

Matt: Lianna, I'm so happy for you—it all sounds so interesting! I'm glad you're making use of so many resources, getting referrals, exploring new opportunities, and that you've got a concentration you're working towards. It sounds like a great way to continue growing and developing your career. I appreciate you taking the time to talk with me again.

Lianna: Awesome, thank you so much, Matt!



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AI IN PEOPLE MANAGEMENT IN THE LEGAL INDUSTRY

OPPORTUNITY, RISK, AND RESPONSIBILITY

Artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping the legal profession—not only in research and litigation, but increasingly in how law firms and legal departments manage their people. From recruiting to workload management and burnout mitigation, AI-powered HR tools are becoming embedded in legal operations. AI is no longer experimental in people management, even as the legal industry adopts technology more slowly than other sectors. Recent SHRM research shows that 43% of organizations now use AI in HR, up sharply from 26% a year earlier, with publicly traded companies leading the way. In contrast, ABA data show that while 31% of legal professionals personally used generative AI at work in 2024, firm-level adoption lags at just 21%, reflecting ongoing concerns about ethics, risk, and governance. This gap between individual experimentation and institutional caution defines the current landscape of AI in legal people management. [[shrm.org](https://www.shrm.org)], [[americanbar.org](https://www.americanbar.org)].

Why AI Is Gaining Traction in Legal HR: Recruiting and Talent Acquisition Under Pressure

Legal employers face mounting competition for talent, rising workloads, and sustained burnout across roles. According to the Corporate Legal Operations Consortium (CLOC), 83% of legal departments expect demand to increase, with 63% citing workload and resource constraints as their top challenge. [[cloc.org](https://www.cloc.org)]

AI-enabled recruiting tools—such as résumé screening, interview scheduling, and candidate matching—are increasingly attractive in this environment. Across industries, recruiting remains the most common HR application of AI, and legal employers are no exception.

However, adoption remains uneven. The ABA reports that larger firms (51+ lawyers) show higher adoption of generative AI (39%), while many firms continue to restrict AI use due to ethical and compliance concerns. [[americanbar.org](https://www.americanbar.org)]

Case Study: Scaling Legal Hiring Without Compromising Fairness

Context: A mid-sized law firm experienced rapid growth in its litigation workload and struggled to process hundreds of associate and paralegal applications efficiently.

AI Use: The firm deployed AI-based résumé screening and automated interview scheduling.

Outcome: Time-to-hire improved significantly. However, a later internal review revealed that candidates with non-traditional career paths were disproportionately filtered out. The firm revised its screening criteria and implemented mandatory human review for edge cases.

Legal Insight: AI reduced administrative burden—but also created a potential disparate-impact risk if left unchecked, underscoring the importance of Title VII-aligned oversight.

AI, Bias, and Legal Exposure

Bias is not a theoretical concern in legal hiring—it is already the subject of litigation. The American Bar Association has noted that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has already settled AI-based hiring discrimination cases, and federal courts have allowed class actions alleging algorithmic bias to proceed. [[americanbar.org](https://www.americanbar.org)]

Independent audits reinforce this concern. AI systems trained on historical hiring data may reproduce inequities unless continuously tested and adjusted. This is particularly salient in law firms, where educational pedigree, writing style, and career linearity often influence selection.

Case Study: Performance Monitoring and the Billable Hour

Context: A large law firm explored AI-assisted productivity analytics to understand associate workloads and burnout better.

AI Use: The system analyzed billing patterns, response times, and communication volume.

Outcome: While leadership gained visibility into uneven workloads, associates raised concerns that the system undervalued mentoring, pro bono work, and complex matters requiring more extended deliberation.

Legal Insight: Quantitative metrics alone can distort performance assessment in professional services, potentially exposing firms to fairness and morale risks.

Well-Being, Burnout, and Predictive Analytics

The legal profession's burnout crisis is well documented. AI-driven analytics increasingly promise early warning signals—tracking sustained declines in engagement or abrupt changes in productivity.

According to Thomson Reuters's 2025 Future of Professionals Report, legal professionals expect AI to free up nearly 240 hours per year, representing approximately \$19,000 in annual value per professional, primarily through efficiency gains. [[thomsonreuters.com](https://www.thomsonreuters.com)]

Yet predictive insight alone is insufficient. Without safeguards, wellness analytics can feel invasive or punitive rather than supportive.

Case Study: Burnout Analytics Done Right—and Wrong

One legal department used AI insights to redistribute caseloads and authorize additional staffing. Another used similar data to pressure attorneys to “optimize utilization.” The difference lay not in the technology, but in leadership intent and governance.

Governance, Ethics, and the Legal Standard

Law firms are uniquely positioned to understand that AI does not reduce legal responsibility. Courts and regulators consistently emphasize that employers remain liable for discriminatory outcomes, even when algorithms inform decisions. As the ABA cautions, proactive governance, including vendor due diligence, bias audits, documentation, and human oversights, is essential to managing AI risk in employment decisions. [[americanbar.org](https://www.americanbar.org)].

Conclusion

AI offers meaningful benefits to the legal industry: faster hiring, better workload insight, and more personalized development. But the profession’s ethical obligations demand a higher standard. The evidence is clear: firms that treat AI as decision support rather than decision authority, and that apply the same rigor to HR technology as they do to legal risk, are best positioned to succeed.

In people management, as in legal practice itself, judgment, accountability, and transparency remain irreplaceable

Appendix A — Legal-Industry AI & HR Footnotes (2024–2026)

- Society for Human Resource Management. (2025). The role of AI in HR continues to expand. <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/research/2025-talent-trends/ai-in-hr> [[shrm.org](https://www.shrm.org)]
- American Bar Association, The Legal Industry Report 2025 (surveying 2,800+ legal professionals and reporting that 31% personally used generative AI at work in 2024, while only 21% reported firm-level adoption, with adoption rising to 39% at firms of 51+ lawyers). [[mckinsey.com](https://www.mckinsey.com)].
- Corporate Legal Operations Consortium (CLOC), 2025 State of the Industry Report (finding that 83% of legal departments expect demand for legal services to increase and 63% cite workload and resource constraints as their primary operational challenge). [[aihr.com](https://www.aihr.com)]
- AllRize, Legal Technology and AI Adoption Report 2025 (noting that law firms remain in early to mid-stage AI maturity, with smaller firms adopting more rapidly and larger firms facing organizational and governance barriers). [[khrisdigital.com](https://www.khrisdigital.com)].
- Thomson Reuters, Future of Professionals Report 2025 (reporting that legal professionals expect AI to free approximately 240 hours per year per professional, representing an estimated annual value of \$19,000 per professional and a \$32 billion combined U.S. impact across legal and tax sectors). [[shrm-res.c...dinary.com](https://www.shrm-res.c...dinary.com)].
- Id. (also finding that organizations with formal AI strategies are approximately twice as likely to report revenue growth linked directly or indirectly to AI adoption than organizations with ad-hoc or informal approaches). [[shrm-res.c...dinary.com](https://www.shrm-res.c...dinary.com)].

Appendix A — Legal-Industry AI & HR Footnotes (2024–2026)

- American Bar Association, Navigating the AI Employment Bias Maze: Legal Compliance Guidelines and Strategies, Business Law Today (Apr. 2024) (discussing EEOC enforcement actions involving AI-based hiring tools and emphasizing employer liability for discriminatory outcomes regardless of automation). [warden-ai.com]
- Bloomberg Law, AI Use in Hiring Is In-House Lawyer Blind Spot, Survey Finds (Sept. 2024) (reporting that 52% of chief legal officers were unaware of AI use in HR functions, compared to only 18% of chief HR officers). [hirebee.ai]
- Secretariat & ACEDS, Global Artificial Intelligence Report 2025 (finding that 74% of legal professionals expect to use AI-driven tools in their jobs within 12 months and that AI knowledge among legal professionals has increased substantially).
- Responsible AI Labs, AI Hiring Bias: Real Cases, Legal Consequences, and Prevention (documenting class-action certification in *Mobley v. Workday, Inc.* and reaffirming that employers cannot avoid liability by delegating employment screening decisions to algorithms). [irjet.net]
- Akerman LLP, AI in Hiring: Emerging Legal Developments and Compliance Guidance for 2026 (summarizing state and local laws requiring notice, bias audits, documentation, and human oversight for automated employment decision tools). [arxiv.org]



Appendix B: Key Statistics on AI, HR, and People Management in the Legal Industry (2024–2026)

This appendix consolidates recent, law-specific data on the adoption of artificial intelligence, workforce impact, and legal risk in people management. It is intended to contextualize the arguments made in the main article with sector-relevant evidence.

AI Adoption in the Legal Profession

- 31% of legal professionals report personally using generative AI at work, while only 21% report firm-wide adoption, highlighting a persistent gap between individual use and institutional governance. [[mckinsey.com](#)]
- Adoption varies significantly by firm size. Firms with 51 or more lawyers report generative AI adoption rates of 39%, compared to substantially lower rates among smaller firms. [[mckinsey.com](#)]
- Legal departments are accelerating adoption: 30% of legal teams report already using AI, and 54% plan to adopt AI within the next two years, nearly doubling adoption since 2023. [[aihr.com](#)]

Implication: AI use in the legal sector is no longer speculative, but governance maturity continues to lag behind experimentation.

Workforce Pressure and the Case for HR Automation

- 83% of legal departments expect demand for legal services to increase, with 63% identifying workload and resource constraints as their top challenge. [[aihr.com](#)]
- Excessive administrative burden remains a persistent issue, particularly in recruiting, staffing, and workload allocation—areas increasingly targeted for AI augmentation. [[khrisdigital.com](#)]

Implication: AI adoption in HR is driven less by novelty than by structural capacity constraints in legal organizations.

Productivity and Economic Impact

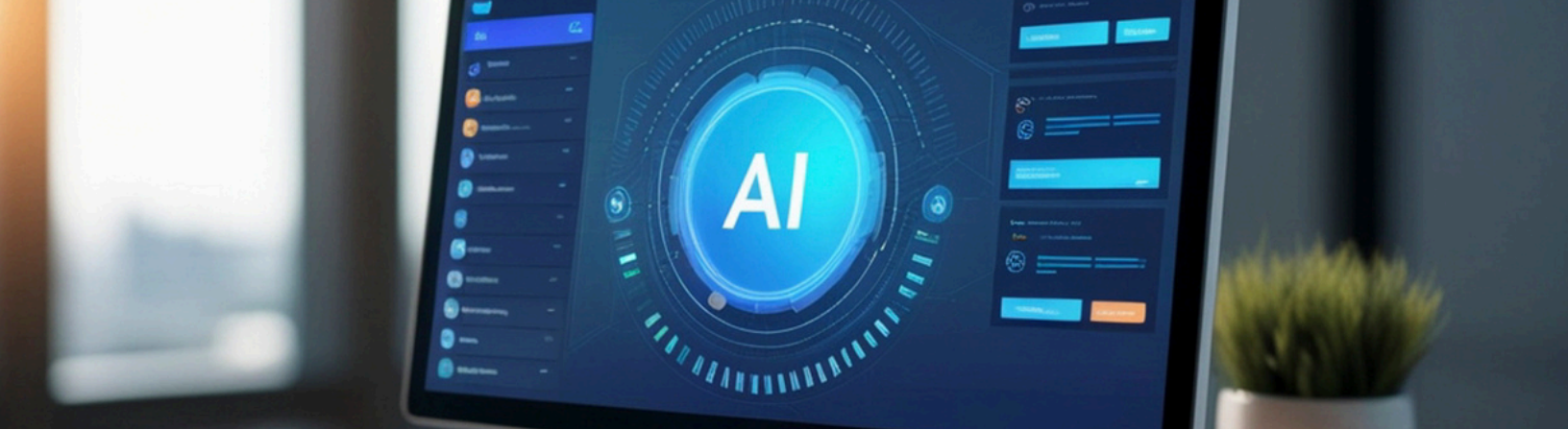
- According to Thomson Reuters, legal professionals expect AI to free up nearly 240 hours per professional per year, up from approximately 200 hours the prior year. [[shrm-res.c...dinary.com](#)]
- This time savings translates into an estimated \$19,000 in annual value per professional, contributing to a combined annual impact of approximately \$32 billion across the U.S. legal and tax sectors. [[shrm-res.c...dinary.com](#)]
- Organizations with a formal AI strategy are twice as likely to report revenue growth linked to AI adoption compared to those with ad-hoc or informal approaches. [[shrm-res.c...dinary.com](#)]

Implication: Strategic AI deployment in people and workflow management correlates with measurable economic value—but only when intentionally governed.

AI in Legal Recruiting and Hiring

- Recruiting is the most common HR entry point for AI across industries, and legal employers increasingly rely on automated résumé screening, scheduling, and candidate matching tools. [[feedough.com](#)]
- Surveys of legal recruiters indicate that AI is primarily used to improve efficiency and throughput, rather than to replace final human decision-making. [[gitnux.org](#)]
- However, legal awareness gaps persist: 52% of chief legal officers' report being unaware of AI use in HR, compared to only 18% of chief HR officers, indicating internal governance blind spots. [[hirebee.ai](#)]

Implication: In law firms and legal departments, AI hiring risk is often an internal coordination problem rather than a technology problem.



Bias, Compliance, and Legal Exposure

- The American Bar Association reports that AI-based hiring tools are already subject to EEOC enforcement, and courts have allowed class actions alleging algorithmic discrimination to proceed. [warden-ai.com]
- Independent reporting confirms that AI hiring tools processed tens of millions of applications in 2024 alone, triggering hundreds of discrimination complaints as usage scaled faster than compliance frameworks. [arxiv.org]
- High-profile litigation—including *Mobley v. Workday, Inc.*—has reinforced that employers cannot avoid liability by delegating screening decisions to algorithms, and that disparate-impact claims may proceed even when humans retain final decision authority. [irjet.net]

Implication: From a legal risk perspective, AI-assisted HR decisions are treated no differently from human ones.

Governance and Readiness Gaps

- Many legal organizations remain in early maturity stages, balancing AI experimentation against ethical rules, client expectations, and regulatory uncertainty. [khrisdigital.com]
- State and local regulations increasingly require bias audits, disclosure, and human oversight for automated employment decision tools, increasing compliance obligations for legal employers. [arxiv.org]

Implication: Governance capacity—not technical capability—is now the binding constraint on AI use in legal HR.

Conclusion

The data demonstrate that AI adoption in the legal industry’s people-management functions is accelerating under pressure from workload, talent competition, and cost constraints. At the same time, legal exposure, ethical duties, and regulatory scrutiny are intensifying faster than governance maturity is advancing. For law firms and legal departments, the challenge is not whether to use AI in HR, but whether they can apply legal-grade standards of oversight, documentation, and accountability to the systems shaping employment decisions.



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Thank you to Matthew Mendel, Solutions Consultant of Innovative Computing Systems, both an ALA & ALANYC Penn Station Business Partner and fitALANYC Team, for his advisory review of this article..



THE ECONOMY OF DEIA

HOW DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION & ACCESSIBILITY CONTRIBUTE TO ECONOMIC GROWTH

In the current moment of United States history, diversity and inclusion remain subjects of intense public debate. With growing efforts to restrict immigration and dismantle diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) initiatives, progress made over previous decades is becoming more vulnerable. To fully understand the potential consequences of these developments, it is necessary to examine historical and empirical evidence regarding the economic effects of inclusion. Across multiple historical contexts, diversity and inclusion have consistently contributed to economic growth by expanding labor markets, fostering innovation, and stabilizing economies during periods of disruption. Contemporary economic research reinforces this historical pattern, demonstrating that inclusion is not only a moral or social concern but also a measurable driver of productivity and financial performance (McKinsey & Company, 2018; McKinsey & Company, 2023).

Although human history has rarely been examined explicitly through the lens of diversity and inclusion, meaningful conclusions can be drawn by analyzing periods of scientific, commercial, and cultural advancement. Intellectual inclusion can accelerate innovation and long-term economic progress.

From an economic standpoint, inclusive societies benefit from their ability to attract talent, diversify expertise, and integrate multiple perspectives into technological and scientific advancement. Broad participation in economic life strengthens productivity, reduces inequality, and mitigates poverty, thereby lowering long-term social and fiscal strain. These dynamics are not limited to early history and are evident in modern economic development as well. Large-scale corporate studies have found that firms with more diverse leadership consistently outperform their peers. For example, analyses of over 1,000 major companies show that organizations in the top quartile for gender diversity on executive teams were 21 percent more likely to achieve above-average profitability, while firms in the top quartile for ethnic and cultural diversity were 33 percent more likely to outperform less diverse competitors (McKinsey & Company, 2018). More recent findings indicate that top-quartile firms for ethnic representation are 39 percent more likely to outperform bottom-quartile firms financially, suggesting that the economic value of diversity has strengthened over time (McKinsey & Company, 2023).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, immigration played a central role in the economic expansion of the United States. Immigrants significantly increased the labor supply by filling essential roles in manufacturing, infrastructure development, and urban construction, enabling rapid industrial growth. Cities such as New York, Chicago, and Detroit developed into industrial hubs by relying on a diverse workforce with varied skills and experiences. As immigrant communities expanded, many individuals established small businesses that contributed to job creation and the growth of consumer markets, reinforcing local and national economic development. Modern data reflect a continuation of this trend: immigrants today account for more than one-fifth of all entrepreneurs in the United States and represent approximately one-quarter of new business owners, despite comprising a smaller share of the overall population. Immigrant-founded firms are also more likely to engage in patenting and innovation, underscoring the enduring economic value of inclusive immigration policies (Chodavadia et al., 2024).

Despite these contributions, anti-immigrant sentiment intensified during the early twentieth century. Similar to contemporary rhetoric, this opposition was driven by fears of wage suppression, cultural change, and political instability. Global events such as World War I and the Russian Revolution further amplified these concerns, culminating in restrictive immigration policies, including the Emergency Quota Act of 1921 and the Immigration Act of 1924. Although these measures were intended to preserve economic stability and protect domestic labor, they ultimately led to labor shortages, production delays, and rising prices, particularly in agriculture. This historical episode illustrates the unintended economic consequences of exclusionary policies and highlights how limiting labor market participation can undermine productivity and economic resilience.

Diversity and inclusion are often portrayed solely as social justice initiatives; however, they also function as powerful economic mechanisms. This became particularly evident during World War II, when large numbers of women entered the workforce to replace men deployed overseas. Before this period, women represented a minority of the labor force and had limited access to higher education and professional employment. As women remained employed after the war, their participation contributed to increased household income stability and sustained consumer spending. According to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, women's labor force participation rose dramatically during the second half of the twentieth century, peaking at 60 percent in 1999 and remaining above 57 percent in recent years (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). Economists widely recognize this expansion as a key driver of U.S. economic growth, particularly because women's employment is more evenly distributed across industries, helping stabilize the economy during recessions and recovery periods (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023).

At the same time, it is essential to acknowledge that much of U.S. economic development was built on profound injustice. Enslaved African labor generated substantial wealth while denying fundamental human rights and long-term economic opportunity. The enduring consequences of slavery and systemic exclusion have imposed lasting economic and social harm on African American communities. Following emancipation, persistent barriers to education, housing, and employment prevented the full utilization of talent and expertise, limiting broader economic potential. Economic exclusion, in this sense, not only inflicted moral harm but also reduced overall productivity by constraining access to human capital.

Landmark legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 marked critical steps toward dismantling these barriers. Although ethical and democratic imperatives drove these reforms, they also yielded long-term economic benefits by expanding access to education and employment opportunities. As exclusion gradually diminished, increased labor market participation reduced inequality and strengthened the skilled workforce, contributing to higher productivity and income growth. The economic effects of inclusion thus extended beyond individual advancement, benefiting the national economy as a whole.

In the contemporary global economy, growth is increasingly driven by knowledge-based industries that prioritize creativity, adaptability, and innovation. Diverse teams are better positioned to address complex problems, serve global markets, and develop products for multicultural consumers. Empirical evidence supports this relationship: companies with higher levels of gender and ethnic diversity in leadership are substantially more likely to outperform their peers financially, and diverse firms demonstrate stronger innovation outcomes (McKinsey & Company, 2018; McKinsey & Company, 2023). At the highest levels of the U.S. economy, inclusion has had an especially pronounced impact, with 46 percent of Fortune 500 companies having been founded by immigrants or the children of immigrants (American Immigration Council, 2024). Collectively, these firms generate trillions of dollars in revenue and employ millions of workers, illustrating the scale at which diversity contributes to economic output and job creation (American Immigration Council, 2024).

Ultimately, sustained economic growth requires broad participation across society. Exclusion not only undermines equity but also constrains innovation, entrepreneurship, and productivity.

The historical and statistical record demonstrates that diversity and inclusion are not peripheral concerns but central components of economic resilience and prosperity in the United States. As debates over DEIA continue, the evidence suggests that policies promoting inclusion are not merely socially desirable but economically essential.

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ACCESSIBILITY ADVANCEMENTS THAT IMPROVE LIFE FOR EVERYONE

Watching a video with captions in a noisy café, pushing a stroller up a gently sloped sidewalk, or asking for directions while driving are everyday actions that feel effortless and routine. Yet many of these conveniences began as accessibility solutions designed to remove barriers for people with disabilities. Over time, they evolved into features that improve efficiency, comfort, and usability for everyone.

In the United States, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) established essential guidelines to ensure equal access in public spaces, workplaces, and digital environments (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990). While these standards were created to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities, the innovations they inspired have reshaped daily life for the broader population. From physical infrastructure to digital technology, advances in accessibility reveal a powerful truth: when design prioritizes inclusion, it creates solutions that benefit society (ADA.gov).

Ramps and Curb Cuts

Many of the most visible accessibility advancements are built directly into the physical environment. Ramps and curb cuts were introduced to make public spaces navigable for wheelchair users.

Still, they now support parents with strollers, travelers pulling luggage, cyclists, delivery workers, and anyone who values a smooth, continuous path. These features have improved mobility for millions and reshaped how communities think about universally accessible infrastructure—a phenomenon often referred to as the “curb-cut effect” (PBS, American Experience).

Automatic Doors

Just as ramps removed barriers at street level, automatic doors addressed accessibility at building entrances. Designed to assist individuals with limited mobility, automatic doors are now a standard feature of modern convenience. They simplify entry when hands are full, improve traffic flow in busy spaces, and make public environments more efficient for everyone (ADA.gov).

Captions

Accessibility innovations extend beyond physical space into how people consume media. Closed captions, initially developed for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, have become indispensable tools. They support viewers in noisy settings, people watching without sound, language learners, and those who process information visually. In the age of social media and short-form video, captions are now considered both accessible and essential (Wikipedia, “Closed Captioning”).

Audiobooks and Text-to-Speech

Similarly, accessibility tools have transformed how people engage with written information. Audiobooks and text-to-speech technology were created for people with visual impairments or reading disabilities. Still, they are now widely used by commuters, multitaskers, and students who learn best through listening. What began as an accessibility aid has grown into a mainstream way of consuming information (ADA.gov).

Velcro

Accessibility has also shaped everyday product design. Hook-and-loop fasteners, such as Velcro, were developed as a practical alternative for individuals who struggled with buttons, laces, or small clasps. Their simplicity and reliability have made them ubiquitous across clothing, sports equipment, medical devices, and consumer products, demonstrating how accessible design often becomes universal design (PBS, American Experience).

Voice Assistants and Speech Recognition

As technology advanced, accessibility solutions expanded into digital interaction. Voice-controlled systems were developed to assist people with limited mobility or difficulty using traditional input devices.

Today, voice assistants and speech-to-text tools enable hands-free communication, navigation while driving, smart home control, and more efficient workflows, benefiting users across all contexts (ADA.gov).

Clear Signage and Universal Icons

Beyond personal technology, accessibility principles also shape shared public environments. Standardized icons, high-contrast signage, and intuitive wayfinding systems were designed to support individuals with visual, cognitive, or language barriers. Their clarity benefits travelers, non-native speakers, children, and anyone navigating unfamiliar spaces (ADA.gov).

Pedestrian Signals and Tactile Paving

These same principles extend to public safety and navigation. Audible pedestrian signals and textured ground surfaces were introduced to help people who are blind or have low vision cross streets safely. Today, they also assist distracted pedestrians, cyclists, runners, and individuals navigating in low-light or poor weather conditions (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990).

Digital Accessibility

Finally, accessibility innovations have transformed the digital world. Features such as keyboard navigation, responsive design, alternative text, and accessible websites emerged from ADA-inspired practices. They now improve usability for all users by streamlining workflows, supporting mobile experiences, and enhancing overall engagement across digital platforms (ADA.gov).

Conclusion

From ramps and automatic doors to captions, voice technology, and accessible digital design, accessibility advancements are not niche accommodations—they are catalysts for widespread innovation. What began as efforts to remove barriers for people with disabilities has become an everyday feature that enhances convenience, safety, and efficiency across society.

Guided by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), inclusive design has reshaped physical environments, transformed how people interact with information and technology, and improved navigation in both public and digital spaces. These advancements reveal a consistent pattern: when accessibility is prioritized, the result is a more intuitive and usable experience for everyone. Ultimately, accessibility does more than level the playing field—it elevates it. By designing with inclusion in mind, society creates solutions that adapt to diverse needs, changing circumstances, and future challenges. Accessibility is not just about access; it is about building a world that works better for all.

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THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING ALANYC'S DEIA INITIATIVES

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