



Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion
Centre canadien pour la diversité et l'inclusion

Success stories

McCarthy Tétrault

A case study in diversity and inclusion

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McCarthy Tétrault: A Canadian success story in diversity and inclusion

By Natasha Vichnevetski, public relations student, Centennial College. Thank you to Lisa Vogt, QC, the First Chief Diversity and Engagement Officer at McCarthy Tétrault.

Promoting diversity and inclusion in the legal profession.

Introducing Lisa Vogt, QC

Diversity is and has always been a core value at McCarthy Tétrault. For the Canadian law firm, diversity is about creating a vibrant, respectful and inclusive work environment that attracts the most talented people and gives them every opportunity to succeed.

In 2013, McCarthy Tétrault appointed Lisa Vogt, QC to the newly created position of Chief Diversity and Engagement Officer (CDO). McCarthy Tétrault was the first Canadian law firm to appoint a CDO. This reflected the firm's innovative and progressive management team.

At the time when she was appointed, Lisa had been a member of the firm's diversity team since 2005 and had served as Chair of the National Diversity Committee for four years. She was also the former head of the firm's Real Property & Planning Group and former regional managing partner in BC. "It was just a natural choice when it came to the decision of taking that role and turning it into a senior leadership role," said David Platts, the current Chief Inclusion Officer at the firm.

Lisa retired from the firm this past January. She left a strong legacy. "McCarthy Tétrault has many important diversity initiatives because of Lisa," said Susanna Tam, Director of Inclusion at the firm.

A role model for women in law

Lisa is a role model for women lawyers in Canada. Throughout her career, she always led by example, showing that it was possible to be successful, even at a time when law was still largely a profession dominated by men.

To say that Lisa has had an accomplished career is an understatement. She was named one of Canada's 100 Most Powerful Women by the Women's Executive Network twice. She was appointed Queen's Counsel in BC and named a Canadian Diversity Champion by Women of Influence. Under her leadership and for four consecutive years, McCarthy Tétrault was awarded numerous distinctions at the annual Women in Business Law in the Americas awards gala. Most notably, McCarthy was named *Best Canadian Law Firm for Women* and *Best National Firm for Work-Life Balance in North America*.

Her personal success, however, was always only one aspect of a much greater purpose for Lisa. “Lisa is a spokesperson, in the sense that she has always been a sponsor of others,” said David Platts. “She has been very good at providing opportunities for others and at encouraging diverse voices to speak up.”

Finally, Lisa was able to raise five children with her husband while maintaining a full-time practice. “She made some choices on being a mom and being a successful businessperson at the same time,” said Platts. “This set her up as a role model — as someone who was willing to accept imperfection in the search for happiness.”

Senior leadership buy-in and diversity as a top priority

Senior leadership buy-in is essential for diversity initiatives to really succeed in any company. One of Lisa’s key accomplishments was to persuade senior leadership to integrate diversity as one of their top priorities. “Once diversity became a senior leadership priority, it was something that got talked about. It opened the discourse to a multitude of important conversations around diversity and inclusion,” Platts explained.

Measuring diversity

Lisa recognized that to recruit and retain a truly diverse team, it would be essential to put specific policies and procedures in place. This included measurement. Canada, unlike the U.S., has no legal obligation to measure diversity. Lisa worked to ensure that diversity initiatives could be properly evaluated at McCarthy Tétrault. The firm now regularly participates in voluntary diversity surveys with the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI).

Women in law: Innovative diversity initiatives

McCarthy Tétrault has always been a pioneer in the way that it promoted gender diversity. In 1921, the firm hired Edith Sheppard, one of the first women lawyers in the profession. Since then, gender diversity has continued to be a core value at the firm.

Lisa took significant steps to further advance gender diversity at McCarthy Tétrault, implementing a number of innovative gender diversity initiatives.

In 2012, under Lisa’s leadership, McCarthy Tétrault became the first law firm in Canada to sign the Catalyst Accord, pledging to increase board seats held by women to 25 per cent by 2017. The board is now 45 per cent women.

Lisa also developed an innovative Parental Support Program to help new parents in managing the demands of juggling a career with home life. The program includes coaching sessions with an external consultant, a parental leave toolkit with helpful information for expecting parents, internal “baby rooms”, emergency daycare support through an external provider, and special travel expenses for nursing lawyers (including expenses for a secondary caregiver). As part of the program, women preparing for parental leave are also paired with a parental leave buddy: a

contact in their practice group who helps them before their leave, keeps in contact while they are away and later assists with a seamless integration back into the firm.

In addition to firm initiatives, Lisa also co-chaired the Law Society of BC's Justicia Project, which encourages law firms to develop best practices to retain and advance women lawyers in private practice.

Other diversity initiatives

In the early days of corporate diversity programs, the focus had mostly been on programs that centered around gender issues. "Lisa realized early on that a truly comprehensive diversity and inclusion program needed to do more diversity," Platts explained.

Pride at McCarthy Tétrault

In 2011, under Lisa's leadership, McCarty Tétrault launched its national Pride Network, believed to be the first lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered network at a national law firm in Canada. The firm also became a corporate partner of Pride at Work Canada, a non-profit that strives to promote inclusiveness for Canadian LGBT employees in the workplace. Today, McCarthy Tétrault is committed to helping attract and retain top LGBT talent and staff.

Cultural diversity

Finally, Lisa worked to encourage cultural diversity at McCarthy. Today, McCarthy Tétrault participates in the University of Toronto's Faculty of Law's Internationally Trained Lawyers Program (ILTP), helping foreign-trained lawyers to enter the job market in Canada. McCarthy Tétrault also sponsors the Ontario, Western and BC chapters of the Federation of Asian Canadian Lawyers (FACL), among many cultural diversity initiatives organized and sponsored by the firm.

Diversity makes us stronger

Lisa may have retired, but her legacy lives on at McCarthy Tétrault. In 2017, the firm was named one of Canada's Top 100 Employers as well as one of Canada's Best Diversity Employers — both for the fifth consecutive year.

"McCarthy Tétrault is a great place to work. Our emphasis on diversity and inclusion sets us apart," said Susanna Tam. "As Director of Inclusion, I see our commitment to diversity. We talk about diversity all the time — and we walk the walk. We are seen as a place where people are included and welcomed. It's how we do business and it is the best way to serve our clients. Diversity makes us stronger."

The Success Story Initiative

There is astonishingly little published that shines a light on diversity and inclusion successes in Canada, though there are many, across a wide range of organizations. Case studies referenced by trainers and leadership tend to be reporting on different countries, cultures, political and economic settings.

The goal of this initiative is to support diversity and inclusion leadership with stories that are relevant to what's happening now, here in Canada. By sharing their stories, we celebrate the successes of Canadian organizations while contributing to learning for everyone that cares about diversity and inclusion.

The employers who have developed initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion as priorities in the workplace are responding to an increasingly competitive economy that's responsive to the diversity of employees – and the country. We are grateful to those who have participated in interviews.

This series of case studies will be published monthly. Subscribing to our monthly newsletter at ccdi.ca will keep you updated with the latest case studies, which will all be posted online at ccdi.ca/successstories. For more information, contact mail@ccdi.ca.

The Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion

The CCDI has a mission to help the organizations we work with be inclusive, free of prejudice and discrimination – and to generate the awareness, dialogue and action for people to recognize diversity as an asset and not an obstacle.

Through the research, reports and toolkits we develop and our workshops, events and workplace consultations, we're helping Canadian employers understand their diversity, plan for it and create inclusion.

CCDI's leadership has a proven model that's cultivated trust as an impartial third party. Our expertise is focused on the topics of inclusion that are relevant in Canada now and the regional differences that shape diversity.

A charitable organization that thinks like a business, we have created a niche with our innovative research technology and data analysis that brings a deeper understanding of Canadian diversity demographics and mindsets at any given moment.

CCDI is grateful for the support of Employer Partners across Canada. For enquiries, contact Susan Rogers, Chief Client Officer, Susan.Rogers@ccdi.ca or (416) 968-6520, ext. 103.

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