

# How I Made Co-Chair Of The Global Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee: 'Actively Solicit Different Perspectives,' Says Alisha Nanda of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom

By Tasha Norman

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**Alisha Quintana Nanda, 44, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom; Boston.**

**Job title:** Litigation partner and co-chair of Skadden's Global Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee.

**Law school and year of graduation:** Harvard Law School, 2003.

**How long have you been a partner at the firm?** I was promoted to partner in April 2019.

**Where were you working before you joined the firm?** I joined Skadden as a junior associate in Boston right after my post-law school judicial clerkship for the Hon. William G. Young in the U.S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts.

**Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to your leadership role?** Jim Carroll, global head of Skadden's litigation and controversy practices, has had a significant influence on my career since day one. Back in 2002, when Jim was a young partner in Skadden's Boston office and I was still a law student, Jim interviewed me for my first law firm job. When I arrived at Skadden as a junior associate, he assigned me to an office near his, so that I wouldn't get lost in our busy practice. The proximity served us both well. He gave me a steady stream of significant and complex matters to work on and learn from. His advocacy and support was critical to my eventual promotion to partner. He also supported my personal commitment to DEI from my early days at the firm,

and he encouraged me to take on leadership roles in the Boston office, despite my relative youth. I helped found our office's first affinity group for diverse lawyers and committed myself to recruiting talented law students to our ranks. Those early efforts laid the groundwork for my most recent transition to co-chair of Skadden's global DEI committee. Jim's role in my career development at Skadden is a testament to the fact that mentors do not need to look like you or share your background to have a significant impact on your ability to grow and succeed in your practice.

**What's the best piece of career/leadership advice you could give a partner who wants to make it to firm leadership and/or manage key firm initiatives?** Start with something meaningful to you and focus at the outset on being a valuable contributor. Actively solicit different perspectives and build support around common plans of action. Establishing yourself as a leader who is able to listen, build consensus and get things done, will help ensure your colleagues think of you when a firm leadership opportunity arises. The experience gained from engagement in committees



Courtesy photo

**Alisha Quintana Nanda, Skadden.**

and activities that are important to you will also help you feel confident in taking that next step when larger leadership opportunities arise.

**Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give your younger self?** Bring your whole self to work. Early on in my career, I learned a great deal about how to be a litigator by trying to emulate talented lawyers more senior to me. While there are many useful things to learn by studying successful lawyers and their habits, there are limitations to that approach. As a Latina and working mother, I sometimes masked certain parts of myself in an effort to fit in. As I grew in confidence and skills over the years, I shook off that mask. I only wish I had done it sooner. It's important to remember that there are many ways to be successful and fulfilled at work and you will achieve the most by being your authentic self.

**In your role what programs/activities were you able to accomplish and that you are most proud of?** I'm so proud of all of the work that has been accomplished by our global DEI committee, our local office DEI committees, our affinity groups, our DEI professionals and all of our allies across the firm in the past year that it's hard to choose. We have been fostering connections and meaningful conversations across the firm with global and cross-office programming (one of the silver linings of our hybrid work environment). We have developed programs that enhance accountability for progress on DEI and refine the firm's talent management processes so they align with our goals for equity in hiring, work allocation, evaluations and advancement. We have launched the Partner Engagement Initiative, which focuses on the many ways in which individual partners can actively contribute to enhancing DEI —from recruiting and development to retention and advancement. We also just launched the newest cohort of our Career Sponsorship Program, which identifies high-performing attorneys from underrepresented identity groups (protégés) and pairs them with partners (sponsors) to help develop their

careers at Skadden. The program has had terrific results thus far; 23 protégés in the prior two cohorts have been promoted to partner or counsel. While there is always much more to be done, I'm proud of the time and energy all of my colleagues have invested and continue to invest in making Skadden a diverse, equitable, and inclusive place to work.

**As a firm leader in your particular role, how would you measure success regarding the initiatives you are working on?** Metrics can be incredibly helpful in measuring the success of our DEI initiatives. They can expose areas of weakness, define goals, show progress and facilitate tough conversations. That said, numbers don't capture everything. Do people feel valued for their contributions and perspectives? Do they feel meaningfully connected to one another? Are they personally engaged in the mission of diversity, equity and inclusion? The answers to these types of questions are often nuanced and cannot be neatly reduced to a datapoint.

**In three words, what have you been focusing on in 2022?**

- Engagement
- Connection
- Accountability

**What is the biggest challenge facing firm/industry leaders today with respect to the key initiatives you are working on?** Working on DEI in a hybrid and remote world can be a challenge. Although we have made important inroads on matters of equity and inclusion in recent years, we need to keep up the pressure and momentum. It is all too easy to backslide when we are not working under the same roof and juggling many priorities. Out of sight can never mean out of mind. We need to think creatively about how to engage and promote our attorneys, while acknowledging the welcome flexibility that the hybrid work model has to offer. If we are thoughtful and listen as we develop policies, and maintain energy and focus, we have an opportunity to continue to make important strides in DEI.