

**International Day for Tolerance:
A Call for Civility, Respect, and Inclusion in the Legal Profession
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November 16 – International Day for Tolerance

serves as a global reminder of the importance of respect, understanding, and the peaceful coexistence of differing ideas and identities. In the legal profession—where competing viewpoints, advocacy, and debate are daily realities—this observance carries particular meaning.



Tolerance in law does not mean agreement. It means engaging with others—clients, colleagues, opposing counsel, or courts—with civility, dignity, and a willingness to listen, even when we disagree.

Why Tolerance Matters in the Legal Profession

Law is built on dialogue, advocacy, and interpretation. These practices are strengthened—not weakened—by diverse perspectives. When intolerance shows up in the form of bias, incivility, or disrespect, it can undermine justice, erode trust, and diminish the reputation of our profession.



Practicing tolerance in the legal field means:

- Approaching differences in culture, gender, race, religion, disability, and background with openness rather than assumption.
- Engaging in advocacy that is firm yet respectful—upholding our arguments without dismissing the dignity of others.
- Creating environments where all individuals—from partners to law clerks to support staff—feel safe to speak, contribute, and be heard.

The Costs of Intolerance in Legal Workplaces

Intolerance is not always loud—sometimes it appears as interruptions, dismissive behavior, microaggressions, or exclusion from key conversations.

Its consequences include:

- **Miscommunication** or breakdowns in client service
- **High turnover**, especially among underrepresented attorneys and staff
- **Mental and emotional fatigue** caused by hostile or dismissive environments
- **Damage to reputation** and client relationships, especially as clients increasingly expect firms to reflect their values

How Legal Organizations Can Promote Tolerance and Civility

Here are intentional steps firms and legal departments can take:

1. Model Civility in Advocacy

- Encourage attorneys to advocate zealously without resorting to hostility or personal attacks.
- Reinforce courtroom and deposition etiquette—firm on facts, respectful in delivery.

2. Create a Culture of Listening

- Train teams in active listening and bias awareness.
- Foster an environment where junior professionals and support staff feel their perspectives are valued.

3. Support Inclusive Dialogue

- Offer DEIA education focused on empathy, cultural humility, and respectful disagreement.
- Facilitate discussions on how differing backgrounds can strengthen legal strategy and client service.



4. Hold Each Other Accountable

- Refresh anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies.
- Encourage employees to speak up when behaviors undermine civility or inclusion.
- Recognize and reward respectful leadership.

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References & Resources

1. **United Nations – International Day for Tolerance**
UN General Assembly Resolution 51/95 (1995) established November 16 as a day to promote tolerance, human rights, and mutual understanding.
<https://www.un.org/en/observances/tolerance-day>
2. **UNESCO Declaration of Principles on Tolerance (1995)**
Defines tolerance as respect, acceptance, and appreciation of the world's diversity.
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org>
3. **American Bar Association**
 - ABA Model Rule 8.4(g) – Misconduct related to harassment or discrimination in the practice of law.
 - ABA Resolution 108 (2020) – Promotes civility, diversity, and inclusion in legal practice.
4. **Civility Guidelines in Law**
 - Seventh Circuit Standards for Professional Conduct
 - State Bar Civility Codes (e.g., California Attorney Guidelines of Civility and Professionalism, Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism).
5. **Legal Industry Research**
 - ABA Profile of the Legal Profession (2024): Diversity, mental health, and professionalism trends.
 - Association of Corporate Counsel (ACC) – "Civility in Legal Practice" Reports.