

## DIVERSONOMICS | EPISODE 2 - TACKLING LGBT INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE

16 November 2016

For episode two of Diversonomics, co-hosts Roberto Aburto and Sarah Willis interview Mark Greenburgh, a partner in Gowling WLG's London office. They discuss the exciting new diversity and inclusion opportunities that have arisen since the combination of Gowlings and Wragge Lawrence Graham, as well as Gowling WLG UK's LGBT OpenHouse initiative.

### Episode tip

"Bring your whole self to work. You'll be better at what you do and a happier person."

Mark Greenburgh, Partner at Gowling WLG



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### Transcript

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**Roberto:** Welcome to Diversonomics. The podcast about all things diversity in the legal profession. I am your co-host, Roberto Aburto, a lawyer at Gowling WLG in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, practicing in municipal law and litigation and one of our co-chairs of our Canadian National Diversity and Inclusion Council.

**Sarah:** And I'm your co-host Sarah Willis, also of Gowling WLG, practicing in the commercial litigation group in Ottawa. However, right now I am continuing my adventures practicing in the Birmingham, England office and it's been a wonderful month so far. I will probably be here for a couple of more months so I am missing Ottawa but England has been fantastic.

**Roberto:** Continuing with that theme today we have our first guest and an internationally focused discussion. Gowling WLG underwent a combination in February, 2016, uniting Gowlings in Canada with Wragge Lawrence Graham of the United Kingdom. This essentially doubled the size of our firm to over 1,400 professionals worldwide which has led to some exciting opportunities for us in the field of diversity and inclusion.

**Sarah:** It definitely has allowed all of the offices to really connect and I am a perfect example of that being on succorance in the Birmingham office.

**Roberto:** Today we have got somebody who I found compelling ever since our first discussion. While I sit on our Diversity and Inclusion Council in Canada, just prior to the combination, I had an opportunity to speak with our guest who is involved with the diversity for our Firm in the United Kingdom, so the equivalent that was at Wragge Lawrence Graham continues on in the UK. Our guest practices in employment law including legal requirements in relation to employment, equalities, bribery and whistle blowing. He is also a member of our OpenHouse network which promotes LGBTQ rights at the Firm so I am very well excited to welcome Mark Greenburgh. Welcome Mark.

**Mark:** Hi. Great to be talking to you.

**Roberto:** Great. Tell us a little bit about your story. How did you get to be here today practicing in employment law with Gowling WLG?

**Mark:** Okay, I have a slightly alternative entry into the Firm because I didn't join until I qualified as solicitor when I was 29. Prior to that I worked in politics and in public administration for a County Council here in England. I decided that I wanted to further my career in the private sector and went back to University and re-qualified and then arrived here back in 2000. You just found out how old I am.

**Sarah:** Okay. Fantastic. I understand you are involved with OpenHouse. Can you tell us a little bit about this and what does it do?

**Mark:** We formed a support network for LGBTQ employees, members of the Firm, people who are working at any of our UK offices. Initially it was really just so we could share experiences and talk to each other and if you had any issues we could share those as well. It has grown both in size and in its formality so we now are used by the Board or by HR to discuss policies and particularly now, with the internationalization of the Firm, to look at how we can take things forward globally. We also do some outreach work into the community so we provide peoples to go into school and talk about diversity role models, obviously from a LGBTQ perspective, with our clients and our past CSR network as well.

**Sarah:** That sounds fantastic. Who are the members? Are they all members of the Firm or are they individuals from the community?

**Mark:** In our network here it is anybody who works with any of our UK offices so you don't have to be partner or lawyer or even employed by the Firm. If you are working in the catering services or business services, one of the outsources providing functions here, you can join as well. We do try to have co-chairs, one of whom is a lawyer and the other one of which is probably from the support side of the Firm because I think they have different experiences and different things to bring to the network. There are about 10 people on the steering committee and then we have both people who are gay, lesbians, bisexual, transgender, as the case may be, as well as a lot of straight allies who come to our events.

**Roberto:** Great. One of the wonderful things that the combination has brought us has brought the OpenHouse lanyards to Canada. Tell us a little bit about the OpenHouse lanyards.

**Mark:** We want to raise the profile of the network and really a good way we found

of doing that was to replace the rather drab slack lanyards which have our security passes on with a wonderful rainbow lanyard which has OpenHouse and the Gowling WLG logo emblazoned across it. We sold out, I mean, we give them away, we don't sell them. We had 200 printed to start with and they literally just flew off the shelves. I think people just enjoy wearing them and some people who don't wear their lanyards all the time and carry their security pass in their pocket, they can just put them on their computer screens, monitors on their desk, or whatever. Just a bit of fun, really. It is really noticeable when you walk in to reception and you find the receptionist wearing them, the catering staff wearing them, partners in the Firm wandering around the building wearing these lanyards. It is very welcoming actually and also brightens the place up a bit.

Roberto: I can attest that they were in a hit in Canada here as well.

Sarah: Yes. I remember that.

Roberto: There was a frenzy over them.

Mark: There are plenty more. I think we should keep printing them until everyone who wants one has one.

Roberto: Absolutely. Please tell us what we are doing right about diversity Mark.

Mark: I think we are doing quite a lot. I think this Firm as a whole is very open and welcoming and there certainly aren't any barriers within the Firm. The very fact that we have a diversity network. We have events at the firm and I think it encourages people to be themselves. I think that has really worked well.

We have advised on policies at the Firm, for example, if you are a same sex couple and you are adopting a child you should get the same benefits and rights as a heterosexual couple who are having a child, whether by adoption or naturally, and to have all those sorts of things in place. Just rolled out transgender support policies as well for people who might be transgendering or want information about it or anything else. We have all those sorts of policies in place. I think it is just trying to encourage people, whether it is by partners like me, and there are 3 out gay partners in the UK, and being role models and just saying "Look, we have done it. You can do it too. You don't have to hide, you can bring your whole self to work." is the message we would give. Whether it is by holding the events and outreach into the community, I think it has all been really positive and well received.

**Roberto:** Mark, I think that is another example of our great cooperation between the UK and Canada because, as you said, the UK has completed their transgender policy and they provided that to us here in Canada so that we've got a starting place at work. A bit ahead in trying to get that same type of policy in place. Really great example of cooperation there, I think.

**Mark:** Another thing we have done is unconscious bias training for all the managers and partners who work in recruitment, whether at trainee level or graduate recruitment or into the support services. It is to try to break the "people like me" culture that we can fall into so easily because you tend to identify and like people who have had common experiences with you and people who haven't had those experiences might be a bit different. You might think "Oh well, might be a bit of a risk to hire that person" but the unconscious bias training makes you really aware of that.

**Sarah:** That is really fantastic. Is that a periodic thing you do with HR and individuals who are engaging in the hiring process or has it just happened the one time?

**Mark:** We went to a training program for all the partners in the Firm and then we have rolled that out to all the new hires, and all the managers who do recruitment now have gone through the training as well.

**Roberto:** It is the same theme but again creating positive pressure on Canada where we did our first round of unconscious bias training last year for senior management and those involved in hiring. Now we are in the process of unrolling unconscious bias training for the whole Firm including students, staff, lawyers, professionals, everybody, which is going to take us a little bit of time but it is in progress and those are happening here. Again, great precedent set by our friends in the UK.

**Sarah:** So it seems like there is a lot of wonderful initiatives going on in the UK. Is there anything you think we should be doing? And I see "we" as in Gowling WLG as an international firm. Is there anything we should be doing that we aren't doing currently?

**Mark:** There is always an agenda to push forward. I think that obviously as a new firm with a new brand, particularly in the UK where there has been a big change in the brand, the name obviously. What is our position in the market? What's our voice? I think we can do some work really to move into the premier league of firms

who are seen as being very pro-equality and open. We have some work to do on that. Tackling support on promotion and on careers. That might be through mentoring programs and giving support to individuals. I think we can do more in our support services. I think actually the lawyers, probably because they have all been schooled in the law above anything else, are very aware of rights and policies and benefits and so forth but making sure that that spills over into our support teams, in finance, in BD, in IT, whatever the case may be, building services, making sure that all our contractors sign up for the same sort of equality standards as we have, so we are doing some work in that area.

I think perhaps the most challenging issue is difficult jurisdictions. We have 9 offices across the world in combination? How are we tackling the issues in areas of the world where it is illegal to be gay? What are we doing in our Dubai office? What are we doing in jurisdictions where, for example, the mood music is just very “anti”, like in Moscow or in Singapore or even in China. We've got some work to do on thinking both about our policies in the host country and also for succending people around the world. Just to make sure we have our awareness really where it should be and perhaps possibly equalize the benefits and the rights which our colleagues in those jurisdictions have.

**Roberto:** Do you have any advice for LGBTQ lawyers or prospective lawyers?

**Mark:** I think the most important thing whether you are a lawyer, prospective lawyer or work in support services in the Firm is bring your whole self to work because you will be better at what you do, you will be a happier person and let's face it, we spend a lot of time at the office. I'd say be confident and I personally very rarely encountered any homophobia or lash back at work.

I think I was the first of the gay partners to bring my other half to a partner's conference retreat and I asked the question “Would that be okay?” and the answer was “Of course it's okay. That is absolutely fine. Why wouldn't you?”. My own coming out was very painless actually. I anticipated many more problems than I actually encountered and the Firm and colleagues were always very supportive. I just really encourage you to relax and be yourself.

**Sarah:** That's fantastic advice, Mark. Thank you so much for being with us here today. This has been an episode of Diversonomics and thank you to all of our listeners for tuning in. If you every have any questions, comments or ideas for topics and guests please look us up at [gowlingwlg.com](http://gowlingwlg.com) and get in touch with us. We are happy to hear from you.

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Roberto: Mark, do you have anything to plug? Any Twitter accounts?

Mark: You can certainly follow me on Twitter. My professional account is @markgreenburgh or you can subscribe to the gowlingwlg\_lgbt account which also plugs all the work of the OpenHouse network does.

Roberto: Great. You can also follow me on Twitter @robaburto. Diversonomics was presented to you by Gowling WLG and produced by Jessica Bowman with special assistance from Sam Bailey and our UK IT folks who helped make this possible. Until next time, be calm and diversely carry on.

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## Episode guest

### Mark Greenburgh

Mark Greenburgh is a partner in Gowling WLG's London office, with his practice focused on employment litigation. He helps clients find solutions to workplace relationship issues and interpret the special legislation or collective agreements applicable to public sector employees.

Mark is also a Higher Rights Advocate, a Freeman of the City of London, Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Solicitors, a member of the City of London Employment Law

## Committee and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

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