

**Education:** JD, New York University; BSJ, Northwestern University

**Company Name:** Holwell Shuster & Goldberg LLP

**Industry:** Legal

**Company Headquarters Location:** New York, NY

**Number of Employees:** 102

**Words you live by:** I am not sure I have any!

**Personal Philosophy:** Be charitable to other people and give them grace.

**What book are you reading?** *Demon Copperhead* by Barbara Kingsolver

**What was your first job?** I worked as a carhop at Sonic Drive-In.

**Favorite charity:** Planned Parenthood

**Interests:** Movies, fashion, generally being geeky about the law

## Don't worry about fitting in. Instead use your background to stand out

Much of my career has been characterized by not feeling as if I fit in. I am a woman of color and the first in my immediate family to go to a four-year university, let alone professional school. Throughout my education and career, most of the other people in the room have not looked like me and the ones who did often did not share my background and upbringing. In these spaces, I generally feared exposure as “not a good fit.” Not smart enough or knowledgeable enough to be there, not connected enough, there were a wealth of different ways I worried I was inadequate to the task. For the first couple of years as an attorney, I was frequently overcome by worry that my perceived inadequacies would swallow me whole. I would lose weekends fretting over concerns that were far too small to warrant such unending attention.

That started to change a couple of years ago. I wish I could say there was a particular moment, a turning point. But I do not think there was. There was just a new feeling within myself that I should stop looking at where I came from as having the potential to hold me back and instead start to see it from a different perspective – that I could use to drive my career forward. Rather than fitting in, I was determined to make myself fit. I was determined to build my own brand as a litigator not in spite of my background, but in part because of it.

I think that is important for women, people of color, and other marginalized groups to understand and embrace their backgrounds. I think often we are taught to minimize our authentic selves in order to succeed. But it is important to recognize that I can be successful by being myself.

Once I began the process of accepting that I have a different perspective, I began to be able to utilize that perspective in a powerful way. For example, I was initially terrified to speak up in meetings. I often did not agree with the people in the room, but I felt I lacked the credentials to disagree. But I am not shy anymore. Part of working in this profession is to think through all angles and it is hard to do that when the people who do not agree remain silent. Of course, I do not always manage to persuade people to my side. But people know what I think and they respect me as a legal mind. I may not “fit in” in the more traditional sense, but I have made myself fit in this profession.

