

Creating Pathways *to Success for* All



Advancing and Retaining Women of Color in Today's Law Firms

Women's Bar Association of the District of Columbia
Initiative on Advancement and Retention of Women

May 2008

In partnership with co-sponsoring organizations: Asian Pacific American Bar Association,
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The Final Report of the Women's Bar Association of the District of Columbia Initiative on Advancement and Retention of Women

Diversity Summit: Creating Pathways to Success for All

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Letter from the WBA President and the Program Chair of the Summit on Women of Color

If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! — Sojourner Truth

This quotation, delivered in the Keynote Address of Michelle Cross Fenty, First Lady of the District of Columbia and an accomplished attorney, reminds us of both the power of the individual and the power of collaborative teamwork. The Women's Bar Association of the District of Columbia ("WBA") hopes to harness the synergy of both to create pathways to success for all through its Diversity Summit, *Creating Pathways to Success for All* ("Summit"), building on its Initiative on Advancement and Retention of Women ("Initiative"). Our vision was to bring the legal community together, especially, but not exclusively, white women and women of color, to change the trend of dwindling numbers of women of color in law firms.

Our challenge in implementing this vision was stark and daunting at the outset. The National Association of Law Placement ("NALP") reports that, of law firms listed in NALP, just 10.07% of associates are minority women and just 1.65% of partners are minority women nationally. The statistics in Washington, DC, are only slightly better at 10.33% for minority associates and 2.11% for minority partners. The ABA Commission on Women's study, *Visible Invisibility*, reported that less than 1% of minority women remained at law firms by their eighth year and that women of color had vastly different experiences at law firms than their male and white female counterparts. These statistics provided us with a starting point and a powerful call to action.



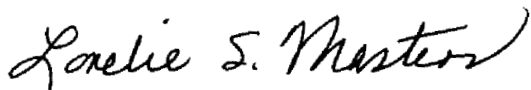


Taking the lead on such daunting challenges is a hallmark of our profession. As we have witnessed throughout history, in the struggle for suffrage and the civil rights movement, through collaboration, *we all win*. This leadership presents an opportunity for the profession to excel and reach new levels. When women of color succeed in law firms, law firms and our profession succeed. Inclusion, success, and excellence are inextricably intertwined.

Inspired by this history of our profession and by pioneers such as Charlotte Ray — the first woman admitted to the bar in the District of Columbia and the first woman lawyer of color in the country — we responded to the call to action with a three-prong approach to exchange ideas and identify meaningful solutions and strategies. The approach included a web-based survey, a Summit, and this Report. The web-based survey generated data from more than 500 attorneys in the Washington, DC legal community. The day-long Summit, on March 19, 2008, at Howard University Law School, addressed key issues such as isolation, mentoring, skill development, and management structures. The Summit challenged lawyers, law firms, law schools, and bar associations to lead the profession and the nation on inclusion through productive dialogue and discussion. This Report summarizes the key findings of the web-based survey and the Summit, conveys resolutions and strategies, and expands the dialogue beyond the Summit participants.

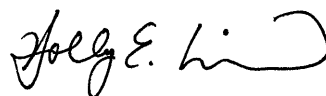
In implementing this approach, we learned that no one stakeholder or action item holds the answer; rather, it is through true collaboration that we can foster meaningful change. With this collaboration and the communication that inherently surrounds it will come a stronger sense of inclusion for women of color — a visible and meaningful presence in all aspects of client service and firm leadership. As Mahatma Ghandi, one of the foremost change agents of the 20th Century, said, *“We must first be the change we wish to see in the world.”* It is that spirit of change, action, and leadership that led the Summit, the Initiative, and — we hope — the community’s continued response.

We thank the WBA Board of Directors, the Initiative Task Force, the Women of Color Advisory Board, the Reporters’ Committee, and our sponsors. All of your ideas, hard work, and passion have made this effort a success. Our continued work and collaboration will allow us to win the talent battle for women attorneys of color and reminds us that: ***We all win when we work together!***



Lorelie S. Masters

President, Women’s Bar Association
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Holly E. Loiseau

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Creating Pathways to Success for All

Summit Moves the Initiative Forward


Chapter

1

The WBA has a long history of leadership in addressing the institutional structures and biases that impede women lawyers and their efforts to reach the highest ranks of our profession. This Summit is no exception — it evolved out of several years of WBA leadership and the continued input of the broader legal community. We highlight a few milestones in this larger effort as context for the findings of this Report.

WBA Focuses on Advancement and Retention of Women

Under the leadership of 2006 WBA President Karen M. Lockwood, the WBA created its Initiative on Advancement and Retention of Women in an effort to identify practical solutions that would advance the careers of women attorneys and increase the number of women partners in law firms. The 2006 Initiative drew more than 230 members of the DC legal community into a cooperative exchange with experts. The WBA's final report, entitled *Creating Pathways to Success*, emphasized the overwhelming consensus of the Initiative participants that law firms can no longer afford to ignore the needs of half of the talent pool, including the needs of those women whom they have so assiduously recruited and trained.



The 2006 Initiative uncovered “unexamined bias” which, if not corrected, operates subtly to shape law firm culture and skew women’s ability to obtain partnership and access to the most challenging and remunerative business opportunities. The Initiative dispelled the persistent misconceptions used to explain the divergence in career paths between men and women. The report concluded that women leave their law firms because they (1) are dissatisfied with prospects for their career development and promotion; (2) conclude that they do not have equal access to high-quality work assignments and business opportunities; and (3) face subtle barriers that impede their pathways to success. The report highlighted the business case for addressing advancement and retention, identified key barriers to women’s success in law firms, and offered practical recommendations for eliminating those barriers. (Report available at <http://www.wbadc.org>).

Three-Part Plan to Continue the Work of the Initiative

Inspired by the success of the 2006 Initiative, in January 2007, during the Presidency of Tracy-Gene G. Durkin, the WBA Board adopted a three-part plan to take the Initiative forward:

- (1) Examine the combined effects of race and gender as they affect women lawyers of color;
- (2) Analyze the effect of gender or other issues on the careers of women in-house counsel; and

- (3) Bridge the gap between law school and practice by developing practical training for women law students on business development and other skills necessary to rise to the top echelons of the legal profession today.

The 2008 Summit: Pathways to Success for All

The WBA recognized that addressing the special issues affecting women of color in law firms was a necessary next step for the Initiative. The WBA’s 2006-2007 Diversity Committee began this important work by holding a series of roundtable discussions. As a result of these efforts, 2007-2008 WBA President Lorelie S. Masters appointed and formalized the WBA’s working group into its Task Force on the Initiative and organized a Summit devoted to diversity and inclusion issues. To organize the Summit, Lorie Masters, with the help of the Initiative Task Force and its Women of Color Committee, chaired by Holly Loiseau, appointed an Advisory Board of experts and leaders in the legal and diversity communities from around the country. Based on the input of these leaders, the WBA conducted an informal web-based survey, circulated in advance of the Summit, to collect data from the DC legal community on issues relating to diversity and inclusion. (*See Appendix A for a summary of the key findings of the survey.*) While not a formal, statistical survey, the survey data was used to stimulate discussion at the Summit and dispel common misperceptions about women lawyers of color.

Identifying the Challenges Facing Women of Color

Chapter

2

Through panel discussions and facilitated breakout sessions, participants in the Summit looked critically at the combined effects of gender and race or ethnicity that face our colleagues who are women of color. Participants included law firm management, partners, associates, clients, law students, recruiting professionals, and bar leaders. Through the collective efforts of the diverse stakeholders in attendance, the Summit identified that women of color face many of the same issues as white women. However, the barriers are more pronounced for women of color because they also struggle with additional stresses caused by exclusion from formal and informal networks that help ensure success in law practice, and the pressure of being the standard bearer for women of color who follow. Our efforts identified the following barriers, real or perceived, that arise over the continuum of women of color's careers:



- The existence of micro-inequities that create feelings of invisibility and isolation among women of color and the threshold need for a focus on inclusion at all levels of the law firm.

- A lack of meaningful communication between law firms and women of color about the firm's expectations and the needs and interests of the women of color.
- A recognition that the practice of law is a business and that law firms have not caught up to corporate America's focus on management training for partners and training for all lawyers, including women of color, to develop broad business skills.
- The ambiguity of core competencies or criteria that firms consider when evaluating performance and making partnership and compensation decisions.
- The general lack of accountability and lack of periodic evaluations of existing diversity programs and initiatives.

As demonstrated in this Report, meaningful change will require an unsparing look at structural issues that impede the efforts of women of color to succeed. Importantly, no one stakeholder alone can implement these action items. The solutions identified by Summit participants underscore the need for collaboration by law firms, individual women of color, clients, law schools, and bar associations.

Working together, we can implement structural change that will benefit not only women of color, but firms, clients, and the profession as a whole.

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Inclusion is the Key

Summit participants resoundingly agreed that achieving a culture of inclusion in law firms is vital to unlock, and resolve, the larger retention and advancement issues.

Recognizing Isolation and the Causes

Chapter



3

What matters is something beyond numbers, because, even if the numbers look good, if there is not inclusion in fact, then...people will not stay in the firm. — David E. Mills, Dow Lohnes PLLC

Firms are working harder than ever to recruit, retain, and promote a diverse group of lawyers. With 83% of the partnerships nationally held by men, reports of alienation are common among women lawyers. However, for women of color, the sense of isolation is compounded by their race. As one African American woman explained in a recent study: *“Being a racial and gender minority in a fairly large firm is a constant culture shock that requires me to constantly play the role of a race- and gender-neutral person in an attempt to ‘fit in.’”*¹

Feelings of Isolation Drive Associates and Partners Out

Women lawyers of color overwhelmingly report feeling invisible, isolated, and alone, which in time leads them to “vote with their feet.” They say that, too often, throughout their day-to-day experiences with firm colleagues and leaders they receive the message that “you need to look like me, act like me and think like me” to advance.

Summit participants reported feelings of isolation and frustration. One junior associate explained:

"I struggle to feel invested in my firm." At the Summit, Andi Cullins, Principal, The McCormick Group, Inc., shared her experience at a professional cocktail party in which she consciously chose not to work a room of white senior male lawyers to see if the room "worked her":

Not one person introduced himself or herself to me.... I was not a person of consequence. They did not flag me as a lawyer, as a client, a candidate for partnership, anything.

Ms. Cullins noted that her invisibility to these senior lawyers was particularly striking given their firms' stated commitment to diversity and assiduous efforts to recruit diverse associates and partners.

Such exclusionary experiences — when repeatedly encountered — have a profound effect on lawyers seeking to find both a "home" and a rewarding career in law firms. Ninety-one percent of the African American female associates who took the WBA survey reported that they experienced a "sense of alienation." Associates' reasons for leaving include: "lack of substantive relationships," "lack of advancement opportunities," and "lack of a mentoring

The example above stirred a palpable sense of agreement and understanding from Summit participants, who shared their own, similar experiences:

Colleagues show signs of discomfort, such as lack of eye contact and cessation of conversation:

"It is very uncomfortable to knock on the door because when I do, the conversation stops. I can sense the discomfort in the room."

Negative perceptions of competence:

"There is a double standard. There is often a 'halo effect' around my male peers, yet if a woman of color makes one mistake it can be very damaging and word gets around the firm quickly."

"Soft" evaluations:

"Supervisors gloss over my evaluations. They do not think that I can take feedback. They are afraid that they will appear discriminatory."

Non-substantive or uninteresting work assignments:

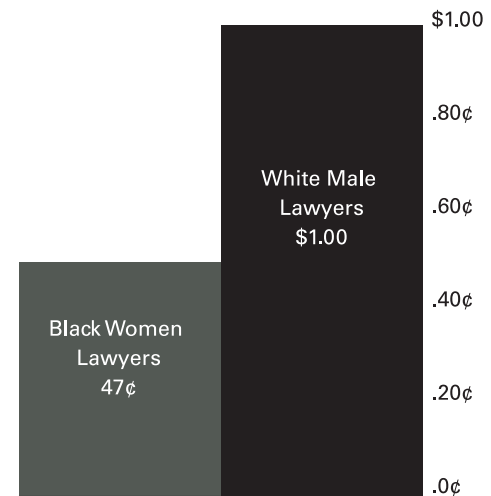
"I feel like I am an after-thought in my firm. I feel like I am at the bottom of the pile. I feel marginalized. I sometimes struggle to get up in the morning and come to work in this dynamic. I am sick of scrambling for work. I feel like I have to be 'almost annoying' to get work."

relationship.” In time, these experiences cumulate and contribute to high attrition rates. According to reports by the Minority Corporate Counsel Association (“MCCA”), 86% of women of color leave their firms by the end of their seventh year.² Only 3.55% of law firm partners are people of color, and less than 2% are women of color.³

Making partner does not eliminate this isolation. Women of color partners often still stand at the periphery of the firm’s internal networks, as they do not fit into the majority’s social patterns, are seldom invited to join the leadership of key projects, and are seldom viewed as natural inheritors of important client relationships. Often, women partners of color are laterals hires who do not have the same connections in the firm as their home-grown counterparts. As a result, the WBA survey revealed, of 21 female partners of color who responded, 19% definitely planned to leave within five years, and only 41% were sure they would be there five years later. A startling 80% of minority female partners reported a sense of alienation or exclusion, compared to 50% of their white peers.

Law firm compensation and the metrics (or lack of understanding of the metrics) that determine compensation reinforce the sense of exclusion and perceived inequity. A Harvard Law School survey of its black graduates found that its black women graduates “earn substantially less than black men. For example, among 1980s graduates in private practice, the average salary among [black] men is \$324,190, while the average for [black] women is \$184,683.”⁴ As MCCA calculates it, these compensation statistics mean that black women

Statistics show black women lawyers earn 47¢ for each \$1.00 earned by a white male lawyer.




lawyers earn 47¢ for each \$1.00 earned by a white man.⁵ More study is needed on compensation issues as they affect women generally, and as they affect women lawyers of color specifically.

Both the data and the Summit participants’ experiences suggest that the isolation stemming from hidden biases and micro-messages causes women of color to exit their law firms at an accelerated rate.

High Attrition is Costly for Everyone

Each time a woman of color leaves her law firm, not only does she lose the investment toward her future success that she has made at the firm, but the firm also loses another opportunity to diversify its ranks, and to bring a different and potentially unique set of talents and viewpoints to its social and professional



fabric. Further, the number of new hires is often times offset by the disproportionately high loss of lawyers of color, leading to diversity statistics that stagnate. These effects in turn impede law firms' ability to respond to client demands for diverse teams of attorneys to handle their matters.

The costs law firms incur as a result of attrition are well-documented. By conservative estimates, it costs a firm \$200,000 to replace a second-year associate.⁶ (Other estimates range from \$280,000-\$500,000.)⁷ These costs include interviewing time by partners and associates at the firm, hiring bonuses, lost training costs for the departed attorney, and additional costs of training the new hire. Every time five associates resign, a firm loses *\$1 million or more*. The cost only rises with the loss of more senior attorneys.

Micro-Messages Have Powerful Cumulative Effects

The role of "micro-inequities" in shaping the careers of women of color and the WBA's identification of implicit bias as a root cause of isolation and attrition is well-documented. Micro-inequities describe the "subtle message[s], sometimes subconscious, that devalue[], discourage[] and ultimately impair[] performance in the workplace."⁸ "[M]icroinequities occur wherever people are perceived to be different"

as with women working in a male-dominated profession such as the law.⁹ These messages can "take the shape of looks, gestures or tones."¹⁰ Thus, many of the experiences described earlier in this Report are in fact reports of micro-inequities.

Similar to "implicit gender biases" documented at the 2006 Initiative¹¹ by Joan C. Williams, Distinguished Professor of Law and Director of the Project for Attorney Retention, micro-inequities affect the "500 hallway encounters" women of color have with their colleagues. Negative micro-messages result from hidden bias, or preconceived notions about race, ethnicity, gender, etc. Individuals tend to notice, interpret, and remember behavior that reinforces their biases or assumptions about gender or race.

This "cognitive bias" accounts for the fact that people are more likely to remember information that supports a subconscious gender or racial stereotype, and are more likely to forget that which conflicts with the unexamined assumption. Thus, assertiveness and expert work by women or women of color in prestigious jobs are more likely to go unrecognized because the women are exhibiting behavior that conflicts with cultural expectations about "womanly" traits and conduct.¹² Conversely, isolated mistakes are unconsciously highlighted, interpreted, and remembered as "typical" professional shortcomings

Invisibility is costly to professional careers; partners do not invest in those they do not even see.

– ABA Commission on Women in the Profession, *Visible Invisibility* at 18 (2006).

in the woman or woman of color, and sometimes extended to other members of her gender or race.

Hidden gender and racial biases play out in subtle and at times subconscious micro-messages.

“Individuals send anywhere from 40 to 150 micro-messages to each other in an average 10-minute conversation.”¹³ Some micro-messages are positive; others negative. Stephen Young, former Vice President of Corporate Diversity at JP Morgan and current President of Insight Educating Systems, points out that employers tend to focus their diversity efforts on obvious issues. However, “subconscious messages that are sent out are far more persuasive and potentially damaging.”¹⁴ When accumulated over time, they can have a significant adverse impact on women of color’s careers because it is “difficult to get away from the expectation that you are supposed to be less than.”¹⁵

All women are negatively impacted by implicit gender bias; however, women of color experience bias based on race *in addition to* gender, while white women experience bias based on gender alone.¹⁶ These combined disadvantages make it difficult for women of color to access the strategic building blocks necessary for success at a law firm and to advance at the same rate as men.¹⁷ A participant in the ABA’s *Visible Invisibility* study provides one example:

If you have opportunities early on to form a continuing relationship with a client, you get increased responsibility over a period of time versus someone who bounces from client to client and from deal to deal, working with different people and not

being able to build up that continuity of experience. After two or three years, you’re going to notice the difference in the level of responsibility and the level of experience that the person who has had continuity has achieved.¹⁸

The various systems used in law firms to allocate work, business-generation credit, and other prerequisites of power and prestige have developed and been perpetuated over time. Law firm partners traditionally have relied on informal, “hey you”

Women of color in our survey and at the Summit reported:

- Less access to high-quality assignments and training opportunities.
- Few or no opportunities to learn business development and participate in “pitches.”
- Difficulties in getting enough work to meet billable hours, even as white lawyers “down the hall” work overtime.
- Lack of access to informal mentoring relationships with the primary rainmakers and firm leaders.
- Lack of inclusion in informal social networks and the resulting exchange of firm and professional experience and camaraderie.
- Lack of visible role models in firm leadership and in the meetings and committees where firm policy or client teams develop.

assignments and networks that prefer, often unconsciously, those who are like them and exclude, or fail to include, those outside the majority group. This unexamined bias leads to a lack of equal access to high-quality training and assignments, networking, business development opportunities, and relationships with rainmakers and champions who help guide lawyers to partnership.

Recognizing Micro-Inequities Can Help Transform Firm Culture

Tackling micro-inequities and cultivating environments of inclusion require a combined commitment from both women of color and their firms. The discussion at the Summit strongly suggests that the typical view that inclusion means a “melting pot” misses the mark. Instead, inclusion is more appropriately viewed as a “colorful quilt.” In a melting-pot format, all the

traits are blended together, and many valuable individual characteristics and perspectives are lost. Moreover, from the perspective of the communities from which women of color originate — and to which they return in their “off-duty” hours — one assimilates at the cost of losing one’s cultural or ethnic identity. A woman of color thus can end up feeling like a person without any real home — an unacceptably high cost for many women lawyers of color (and most people generally).

With a “colorful quilt,” in contrast, each piece has its own place, and the unique qualities of each add to the value of the whole. Viewing inclusion as a “colorful quilt” ensures that individuals are not lost within the larger group. Thus, to create a more welcoming atmosphere, the goal is to embrace all backgrounds and experiences, not erase them.

[Micro-inequities] get to the DNA of culture change.

– Lise Funderburg, The Little Chill, O Magazine, 302 (Nov. 2005), quoting Stephen Young.

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Collaborating for Success

We All Win When We Work Together

Chapter

4

The Summit stimulated a tremendous amount of creative thinking and problem-solving. That momentum and energy presented its greatest takeaway. Individuals and entities have worked in relative isolation on these issues for too long. The notion that a diverse mix of stakeholders, including law firm management, partners, government lawyers, business leaders, associates, bar association leaders, and law students could engage in a dialogue to produce change marks the beginning of a winning strategy in the battle to retain and advance women of color.

Summit leaders, speakers, and participants repeatedly identified action items that fall to all stakeholders to implement. This section highlights the roles of law firms, clients, individual attorneys, law schools, and bar associations in achieving change. If, as we believe it will, our collaborative work succeeds, we will achieve the inclusion we seek as well.

Law Firms: Reforming Structures to Remove Barriers

As a profession, we need not only to create a culture of inclusiveness but also to empower women of color by encouraging them to take control of their careers, to be proactive and persistent, and to have faith that they can effect change, for themselves individually and for their community.

Creating a safe environment that promotes empowerment requires firms to undertake rigorous self-examination, rather than making light of the concerns voiced by those outside the majority group as exaggerations or distorted perceptions of reality. Openness and honest dialogue among all members of the firms, especially those in senior management, are the keys to identifying, and banishing, micro-inequities and the structural barriers to success. Firms can thereby work to alleviate the fear women of color face in addressing these issues candidly, without euphemism. For their part, women of color can take strength from the recognition that, today, with clients' and society's desire for inclusion, all of us can seek change with a boldness that was not available to attorneys of prior generations.

Improved Communication is the Key to Increased Retention

The theme of communication was so pervasive at the Summit (and throughout the WBA's Initiative) that it bears recognition as its own strategy for success. Efforts such as this Summit create an unprecedented dialogue between firms and women of color. Capturing and continuing that dialogue offers tremendous value to all stakeholders.

As a first step, law firms can empower women of color by creating an environment where they can speak candidly, without penalty. Doing so will help all stakeholders recognize and correct the mixed messages, and micro-inequities, that can lead to isolation and failure to thrive in the law firm environment. Some examples of techniques that help foster more effective communication include:

- Support firm-sponsored affinity groups and other environments that will allow women of color both to express themselves openly, without fear of reprisal or unfounded criticism, and to build relationships with others like themselves inside and outside the firm. These groups should recognize the unique concerns of women of color.

Every woman of color — whether she is a first-year associate or a senior partner — has a story about why she wanted to be an attorney.

Those stories vary from attorney to attorney.

At every level in her career, she still has time to frame that story, to shape it before the final frame is in place.

— Sonia Murphy, Howrey LLP

They should be encouraged to make critical connections with affinity groups that are forming within client organizations.

- Establish pipelines for diverse attorneys to communicate their concerns to firm management in an anonymous and non-threatening way (including perhaps appointing as ambassadors trusted partner(s) or senior counsel(s) who may, but need not, be women and minorities).
- Express management's commitment to consider new ways of doing things to improve the firm environment on an ongoing basis — including confronting outmoded patterns or inappropriate behavior from even the most senior partners and rainmakers — so that attorneys feel that they can effect change, rather than leaving the firm without airing their concerns.
- Support “reverse mentoring” to promote dialogue among women of color and law firms. In this process, associates sensitize partners to the experiences of associates in that group, their priorities, and expectations.
- Develop lines of open communication that will work to address concerns before women of color decide to leave a firm. Ideally, attorneys first

would give firms a marker, and candidly discuss any problems or concerns before the attorney has made the final decision to leave, to allow the firm a chance to address those issues. Those conversations can help the attorney assess her reasons for leaving and help the attorney gauge the firm's response.

- Conduct exit interviews (“blind” or anonymous, by a third party) to understand why the women are leaving and to foster an environment encouraging women to be open in their answers.

Effective Management Will Improve Advancement and Retention


Effective management is critical to advancing and retaining women of color. Although effective management is nuanced and particularized to each entity, several recommendations emerged from the Summit: The need for effective allocation of responsibility, accountability for results, and equalizing access to business development opportunities.

Include Women of Color in Leadership and Allocate Responsibility and Credit Appropriately

Firms need to groom and position women of color prominently in leadership positions, such as

Clients are starting to realize the benefit of a diversified team. A diverse team of lawyers brings novel and unique approaches to solving their issues. Having a diverse team of lawyers means that the faces of the firm reflects the faces of its clients. Diversity...is smart business.

– Michelle Cross Fenty, First Lady of DC, of Counsel, Perkins Coie LLP, Summit Keynote Speaker



leadership of practice groups and membership on partner-nominating committees, compensation committees, and other key committees. Ensuring leadership inclusion will yield several results: It will develop leadership skills and experience of women of color; it will incorporate new perspectives and foster better decision-making; and it will increase confidence among traditionally marginalized groups.

In many instances, firms struggle to appoint representational leadership because of long-standing existing leaders. Summit participants acknowledged that the attorneys who traditionally have held leadership positions were not necessarily the best leaders, but, rather, those with good books of business. Firms can build a stronger foundation for growth when they advance beyond this outmoded model.

Successful strategies include:

- Giving junior partners, including representatives from diverse groups, the opportunity to transition into leadership roles, bringing fresh ideas and a broader perspective to firm management.
- Appointing co-leaders or co-chairs as an effective interim solution. In practice, participants reported that appointing co-leaders has not diluted the leadership role because it includes sufficient responsibility already. Firms can be proactive in minimizing the risk that women of color co-chairs might be restricted to a secondary position or be perceived as such.

Women of color are highly committed and make tremendous contributions based on their unique

experience and perspectives. However, firms often call on women of color to take on cumulative leadership responsibilities, such as recruiting, diversity committees, and mentoring, a burden arising from the need for diversity — and the paucity of women of color in the ranks. Women of color face tremendous pressures to manage these responsibilities with their need to bill hours and develop business.

For these reasons, it is vital that firms recognize and reward women of color and others for their contributions and sacrifice, in terms of both their compensation and their stature at the firm. Participants spoke favorably about the role of central managers, such as chief diversity officers, in overseeing and monitoring these processes.

Establish Metric Systems by Which Managers are Accountable for Progress and Results

Many firm managers wear multiple leadership hats, yet are evaluated only under limited client development metrics. Leadership without accountability is hollow. Firms can incentivize attorneys to take ownership of issues relating to advancement and retention of women of color. Firms may also need to reassess the valuation of partnership contributions overall and ensure that their performance metrics are in line with their stated values.

Giving “credit” to partners for their contributions to firm management responsibilities would help minimize pressures. Some strategies include:

- Tying success to compensation to ensure accountability.

- Creating diversity checklists and scorecards to help make firm leadership and partners accountable for diversity, particularly when diversity metrics are tied to compensation.
- Compiling objective data and statistics, making these issues easier to present to managers than anecdotal accounts, which can be explained away.

Instituting accountability measures improves the commitment and creativity of managers in key diversity roles. It rewards good managers and good mentors. It also sends a strong message of commitment and value to women of color.

Integrate Women of Color and Employ Business Management Techniques for Success

Law firms have evolved into business institutions in some respects, but not in others; in these areas, many business management elements remain deficient. Many firms have not yet concluded that adopting effective strategies to minimize isolation and foster inclusiveness is a winning proposition, a way to succeed, a way to win in a competitive marketplace, and a way to foster better decision-making.

Clients often remark, as did many participants at the Summit, that law firms parade women of color in business pitches to tout the firm's diversity, but fail to use a diverse team in practice to provide the kind of legal support and perspective that clients expect. One participant reported feeling that the firm

"recruited the hell out of me" and "now I am just here." This failure to integrate diverse lawyers into the client-service team limits the range of substantive and practical input and insight that could benefit the client and ultimately hampers the firm's business development.

Firms also can learn from business-oriented processes for managing people, distributing workloads fairly and evenly, and providing constructive, timely feedback to foster inclusion and ensure that all lawyers in the firm develop to their full potential. Summit participants identified training as a catalyst for firms to adapt fully to the business of law. For example, some firms are bringing in business professors to teach attorneys how to manage, delegate, and give feedback effectively. Such training creates more effective managers and increases firms' ability to retain their attorneys, including women of color.


The Pathway to Success Requires Action Throughout the Entire Career

Summit discussions demonstrated that extending the pathway of success expands in both directions, back to law school and beyond partnership.

The first step is transparency, to ensure that women of color have the same opportunities as their peers to develop core skills and competencies. The second step requires firms to look critically at the equity and non-equity partnership ranks, cultivating business

It is important to be persistent and systematic in skills development.

*To-Quyen T. Truong, Member,
Dow Lohnes PLLC*



development skills in women of color, and revisiting the valuation model used to compensate and reward partners.

Improving Transparency Through the Identification and Development of Core Competencies

Throughout the Summit, women of color expressed frustration with a general lack of clarity and candor in the partnership dialogue: As one participant describes it, *“Partnership feels like a ‘mystique’ to me.”* Another participant compared partnership to *“a moving target.”* Summit participants called for firms to identify and communicate the core competencies that women of color need at each level in their career, to work with women of color to develop those skills, and to structure feedback around those skills.

Identify Core Competencies: Women of color are often disproportionately disadvantaged by the lack of clarity and transparency. Aspiring partners in the “in-group” typically have had support and champions to help them navigate these mysterious cross-currents. Efforts to capture this information, develop a defined list of core competencies for advancement, and communicate it transparently to all lawyers, partners and associates alike, will level the playing field for all.

Ensure That All Attorneys Can Develop

Competencies: With core competencies identified, firms can use the core criteria to manage workloads and distribute appropriate assignments for the development of all attorneys.

Give Comprehensive Performance Evaluations:

Core competencies provide the necessary framework

for meaningful feedback to all associates. By creating objective promotion and advancement criteria, firms promote candid discussions between partners and associates about skills development and what lawyers need to do to reach the next level. Firms can develop new systems to acquire and track each attorney’s progress in meeting the core competencies.

Examining and Assessing the Institutional Path to Partnership

A Critical Look at Equity/Non-Equity Partnership

Ranks: Summit participants emphasized the disconnect between the number of women of color in equity versus non-equity partner arrangements. Objective data on where women — and women of color — fall on the spectrum of partnership is critical. Failing to distinguish between equity and non-equity partners “misrepresents the real state of the partnership,”¹⁹ especially given the disturbing data on compensation for women of color noted above. Firms may have found only a temporary or cosmetic solution to advancement if they are “parking” women of color in non-equity positions. Although this approach may strengthen the law firm’s diversity numbers, it does not ensure that women of color have a meaningful voice at the partnership table.

The strategies employed to move women of color into non-equity partnership positions can be used successfully to move these same women into the ranks of equity partnership. For example, mentoring relationships, professional development, inclusion in client-service teams, and clear communication regarding expectations are critical.

Having an expectation of becoming a partner and remaining a partner without controlling significant business is unrealistic.... It has been my experience with young attorneys working their way up through the ranks that this concept is not well understood. Almost all of them start out feeling and continue feeling for a long time that it is enough to come to work in the morning, bill time, and go home at night....

– ABA Commission on Women in the Profession, *Visible Invisibility* at 19 (2006).

Developing Business Generation Skills: The 2006 Initiative underscored that the key to success in a law firm is business development: Partners who develop a practice of their own are more likely to find it rewarding and remain in law firms. In contrast, partners who rely on colleagues for business and work flow often feel the demands and strains of associate life in the partner ranks. In the current tiered partnership model of many firms, business development is also the key to equity partnership.


Women of color face unique challenges in building business. The WBA survey revealed that 67% of women partners of color thought that colleagues did not introduce them to significant firm clients and that, unlike male colleagues, they would not be able to obtain business generation credit for, or inherit, firm clients.

By including women of color in important, productive roles on projects and in developing the ongoing client relationship, firms and their clients will garner the full benefit of their participation. Likewise, firms will realize benefits from providing opportunities for women of color to learn, not just legal skills, but also business skills and techniques to develop client

relationships. Women of color who participate in the development of the business pitch and the maintenance of the day-to-day client relationship will learn by doing and by example.

Participants cited the following examples of steps that law firms can take to cultivate business development skills in attorneys:

- Include women of color in important client relationships.
- Identify those women of color whom the firm can groom to take over important client relationships and firm management roles.
- Pair women of color with senior partners to promote training so that women of color can take over these leadership roles and client relationships.
- Recognize the unique opportunities and approaches to business development that firms create by actively supporting the participation of women of color in external organizations and communities, even those that fall outside the mainstream.

- 
- Engage in peer review. Pair women of color with other partners to work together on business development. Partners can learn from the different techniques and strategies that they observe.
 - Market successful diversity efforts to firm clients and find ways to work together; many companies are struggling with the same issues.

Broadening the Skills Set Valuation: Taking the partnership valuation beyond business development will benefit the firm and women of color alike. For example, skills such as case management, organization of large teams, and interpersonal skills, in today's legal practice, offer critical value to a firm. Similarly, giving credit for contributions in the areas of recruiting, mentoring, etc., also helps to strengthen the foundation for firm growth. Reconciling the partnership value proposition produces a broader range of key skills necessary for a firm's long-term survival.

Critical Re-Evaluation Can Strengthen Existing Programs and Structures

Most firms have taken several identifiable steps to retaining and advancing women of color, both directly and indirectly. Firms may rely on direct diversity programming, mentoring, and evaluation processes to demonstrate their commitment to women of color. As shown at the Summit, the WBA survey, and by other objective data, firms will benefit from frank, periodic assessments of the effectiveness of these programs.

Demonstrate Commitment Through Work on Diversity Committees and Initiatives

The hallmark of most law firms' diversity efforts is a diversity committee or initiative. These programs provide valuable opportunities for women of color to interact and provide mechanisms for informal mentoring and support. These efforts, however, are historically bottom-up programs. Leadership of such efforts historically has not included senior firm management or top business generators, or such senior attorneys might have participated at the initial stages of these efforts only to drop out over time.

The absence of firm power-brokers in diversity committees and initiatives does not go unnoticed by the intended audience — women and lawyers of color. Absent effective leadership and commitment from the top, these programs function largely as social and support programs. Accordingly, although they can provide critical resources and outlets to women of color, Summit participants found that they often are ineffective in promoting change or raising concerns beyond the committee.

Effective Mentoring Programs Enhance Career Development

Women of color often leave law firms because they lack the support and mentoring that they need to help them learn the unwritten rules of practice, develop business, and navigate firm politics. Their male and non-minority peers are more likely to acquire this information through informal or family relationships.²⁰ In fact, a recent study found that 67% of women of color wanted more and better mentoring, as did only

There is a lack of real models for minority women associates to look up to to help navigate the morass of the law firm culture.

— Thomas W. Jones, Jr., Attorney Placement Consultant,
Alpert Associates, LLC

32% of white men. Notably, the same study found that 52% of white men found that developing a book of clients had the greatest impact on their compensation, as opposed to only 8% of women of color.²¹ The relationship between a lack of mentoring and lack of focus on business development is significant. The study's authors explain:

Their exclusion from strategic networks and assignments that led to meaningful client contact most likely kept many women of color from indicating that developing a book of clients helped to increase their overall compensation.²²

Developing Effective Formal Mentorship


The success of formal mentoring programs depends on the commitment, and perhaps the power and success, of the mentor and the chemistry of the mentoring relationship. At times, formally assigned mentor relationships can range from awkward to forced to simply non-existent. Although it is admittedly too idealistic to create perfectly compatible mentoring pairings, structure seemed to be the key to making these formal relationships as productive as possible.

Participants suggested a number of recommendations to help ensure effective mentoring:

- Providing opportunity for choice in the mentor-mentee pairings.
- Instituting mechanisms for mentee feedback and mentor accountability in the mentoring relationship, to ensure that mentors are engaged in the process and to improve future pairings.
- Training on mentoring to increase the effectiveness of formal programs. For example, it would be helpful for firms to explain to new associates what to expect from a mentoring relationship and how to use the relationship to support their professional development. Communicating clear expectations for partner mentors would increase uniformity in practice.
- Exploring types of formal mentoring relationships other than the traditional partner/associate mentoring typical at most firms. For example, linear mentoring pairs attorneys at the same level of professional development so that they can share different perspectives, coach peers, and exchange knowledge.

Structures for Performance Evaluations Should Be Equalized

Performance evaluations promote the development of all attorneys, enabling them to assess their performance in the firm and their prospects for



advancement and to identify areas for growth. Yet, the effectiveness of evaluations hinges on the reliability and substance of the information communicated.

With “soft evaluations,” supervisors gloss over feedback and steer away from a substantive and critical evaluation of the attorney’s performance. “Soft evaluations” may arise out of a supervisor’s fear that the attorney might suspect discrimination, the supervising attorney’s general discomfort, or poor communication or confrontation skills.

Whatever the root cause, “soft evaluations” jeopardize the ability of women of color to compete with their peers in several ways. The lack of effective feedback can undermine an attorney’s sense of confidence and pride in her work product. It also deprives her of the critical feedback that her peers receive, which thus undermines her ability to improve her work and to correct mistakes or weaknesses. Ultimately, many supervising attorneys “vote with their feet” when making future assignment and staffing decisions. Women of color thus often do not have a timely opportunity to address supervisors’ concerns and lose out in future staffing and partnership decisions in part by default.

Summit participants highlighted several strategies that firms can employ to ensure that women of color receive the accurate, constructive, and timely feedback necessary to professional development:

- Implementing stronger measures to manage and standardize the feedback process for all attorneys.
- Ensuring that attorneys receive substantive feedback on all significant projects and instituting accountability for providing such feedback.
- Designating a manager to review all written evaluations to help spot inconsistencies in content and candor.
- Where inconsistencies exist, conducting in-person meetings with the supervising attorneys to flesh out and resolve any inconsistencies in their evaluations.

Clients: Partnering to Ensure and Drive Success

Clients are driving today’s imperative for diversity. This development has shifted the landscape, awakening firms to the need to diversify their ranks at all levels. In a recent speech at the Rocky Mountain Legal Diversity Summit, Miquel Rivera, Associate General Counsel at Wal-Mart, explained the steps that Wal-Mart is taking to increase diversity of its outside counsel:

Diversity is one of three criteria that we use to measure outside counsel and in making hiring decisions. We measure our outside counsel on their diversity, cost effectiveness and performance. We have fired a number of law firms for failing to make good faith efforts toward diversity. We have moved \$60 million in annual fees from white male relationship partners to new female and minority relationship partners, and we have

continued to identify women and minority relationship partners as changes at our law firms require it.²³

Clients can help firms and women of color tackle this issue by continuing their demands for diversity and partnering with law firms to implement structural changes that will enhance inclusion — and thus firms' ability to retain women lawyers of color.

Strategies to help clients and firms effect change include:

- Developing and communicating diversity goals and benchmarks that clients want firms to achieve.
- Working with law firms to identify diverse teams and ensuring that fees or other credits are allocated to all with significant responsibility for the client team.
- Establishing mentoring or partnering relationships between in-house lawyers and diverse firm attorneys.
- Insisting on accountability for maintaining and retaining diverse teams.
- Implementing lines of communication between clients and law firms that help ensure reciprocal feedback and input from all team members, including women of color.
- Requesting that firms measure, and communicate to all, diversity metrics.

Partnering with Clients to Achieve Diversity Goals: The GM Model

General Motors Corporation views diversity — opportunities for women and minorities — as part of its corporate duty. GM applies this approach both internally and externally. It measures diversity metrics for all law firms every year and a firm's ability to retain business and acquire new business is influenced by its diversity performance. In addition, for certain of its major firms, there are financial consequences if the firms do not meet agreed upon diversity targets. GM is now looking beyond the numbers and asking some key questions. Have minority and women attorneys done meaningful work on cases? Are minorities and women attorneys becoming positioned to act as lead lawyers on our cases?

GM found that partnering with firms achieves the best results. GM selected six key relationship firms. It partnered women and minority associates with an in-house GM attorney mentor. The GM mentor will work closely with the firm to facilitate and coordinate development so that the work on GM matters can fit into an overall firm development plan for the associate. The expectation is to develop lead attorneys that reflect the diverse communities in which GM does business and to have success on GM matters readily translate to success within the firm.

GM believes that, once attorneys are tied into the client and loyal to the client, they will be inherently loyal to the firm as well. GM wants its outside counsel to be loyal to both the firm and to GM.

— Suzanne Miklos, General Motors Corporation,
WBA Advisory Board Member



Lawyers: Taking Ownership

Despite the institutionalized challenges that women of color face, the solution is not simply waiting for the institutions to change. Each woman has the power to help create the change she seeks.

Active Career Management

Women of color can improve their careers through proactive career ownership and management techniques, in partnership with their firm. Women of color should “own” their career beginning on day one. First, the attorney should assess her personality and strengths and compare them to her career goals. For example, the strengths that allow an attorney to succeed in litigation can be very different from those in transactional work. Second, she must take steps to learn about the inner workings of the firm’s practice groups and the experience of working in those groups. Finding a practice area that not only appeals to one’s personality and intellect, but also to one’s attitude about working, is very important.

In addition, some practice areas tend to be more profitable, or more likely to serve business needs (e.g., bankruptcy in times of recession) than others. Women must recognize these factors as they make decisions about developing expertise and moving into partnership positions.

Networking: Building Relationships That Matter

Networking is essential, both inside and outside the firm. This is particularly important for women of color. As one participant explained, *“For men, their social*

and professional networks are often the same. Their personal relationships often turn into business development relationships. This is not often true for women.”

Women of color maximize the benefits of networking when they build relationships with attorneys of different backgrounds, in different practice areas, and at different points in their careers. Internal networking is crucial because mentoring and sponsorship relationships add to a junior, or even senior, associate’s stock, provide valuable information about paths for advancement within the firm, and increase opportunities to participate in career-building client and firm matters.

External networking diversifies the advice that informs career decisions. Additionally, it allows the attorney to build relationships with potential clients, even if the conventional wisdom states that she is not at the point in her career at which client development is necessary. Moreover, rather than simply relying on the firm to take her where she wants to go, the attorney can use her external network to open opportunities that may not be available at her firm.

This web of connections and support networks adds to a sense of empowerment and control over the direction of one’s career and professional development.

Critical Feedback: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Obtaining feedback is indispensable to professional development. Women of color often shy away from

pushing their supervisors to give meaningful and critical feedback. Although they may be hesitant to open themselves up to criticism or to make demands on the busy lawyers who supervise them, persistent follow-up on individual assignments is necessary, even if uncomfortable. Taking ownership to seek a truthful and critical evaluation is essential to professional development and advancement.

Law Schools: Preparing to Succeed from Day One

Career development is a process. In developing pathways to success for all, legal education is the entryway. The attendance of law students at the Summit underscores the ambition of young women of color and their desire to understand what it takes to succeed.

Women need to think about these larger career strategies earlier than ever — and with more sophistication. According to M.J. Tocci of Fulcrum Advisors, a consulting firm that has been analyzing networks in law firms, “for women and people of color the first 12 weeks at a law firm are critical to developing the relationships that give lawyers access to necessary resources throughout their careers.”²⁴ Thus, training law students, particularly those from outside the prevailing “in-group,” on ways to identify those people within the firm that new associates need to know and who need to know them before they actually enter the firms can significantly increase young lawyers’ chances of achieving long-term success. Such training helps offset disadvantages that those without ready-made access to traditional informal networks and mentoring face.

Summit participants suggested the following recommendations for law schools:

- Educating students regarding the dynamics of firm culture.
- Providing broader skills training on networking and client development.
- Offering forums, internally and externally, for women of color to begin networking and developing professional support systems.

Increasing diversity and inclusion will raise the public’s confidence in our profession, and strengthen decision-making by including the widest variety of input. Collaboration among law firms, bar associations, and law school affinity groups might include mentoring between schools and firms, more panel discussions, or targeted programming to educate students.

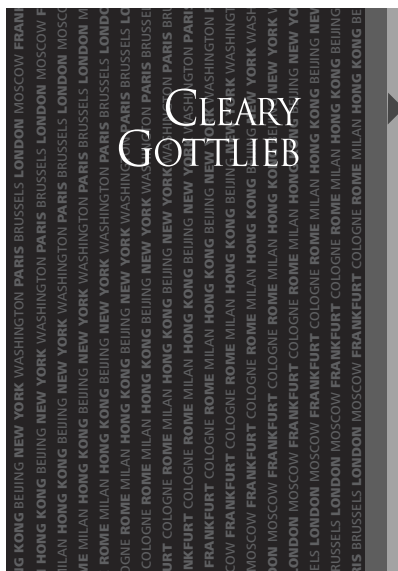
Bar Associations: Providing the Voice and Vision to All

As mentioned throughout this Report, no one stakeholder can change the profession, but, together, we can achieve the change we seek. Bar associations, we believe, have a critical role to play in the advancement and retention of all women lawyers, particularly women of color, because they can build bridges among the different stakeholders. Bar associations’ most valuable contributions lie in providing information and access to networking and mentoring opportunities.

Summit participants identified the following action items for bar associations:

- Provide information on best practices for improving the advancement and retention of women of color, as well as current statistics and relevant studies.
- Create formal or informal mentoring programs.
- Provide networking opportunities.
- Offer training programs for law students and practicing attorneys that focus on developing leadership, networking, and business generation skills.
- Provide opportunities for open and safe discussions on issues of diversity for all stakeholders.

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The Solution Preempts a Conclusion

Do not be bound by the paradigms of yesterday!

– Benjamin F. Wilson, Managing Principal, Beveridge & Diamond, P.C.

Action Items to Work Together for Change

Chapter

5

While achieving change is not easy, as demonstrated by many of the legal community's prior efforts, the overwhelming starting point that emerges from the WBA Initiative, Summit, and Report is straight forward – **ACTION!** Law firms need to act. Individual attorneys need to act. Clients need to act. Law schools need to act. Bar associations need to act. We all need to both act in our own institutions and simultaneously work together to maximize the impact of that action. The challenge, of course, returns to the question of where to begin. What to do?

The preceding sections of this Report articulated the ways in which the WBA Initiative, Summit, and Report, moved the diversity discussion to a new level by bringing together all stakeholders. From this section, the WBA resoundingly hopes that we all return to our spheres of influence, our respective institutions, and start acting. This section pulls all of the dialogue, energy, and sense of purpose forward into action items for each stakeholder.

The WBA led the way with its Initiative, Summit, and Report, and the legal community followed in its support, attendance, and enthusiasm. Let us all continue that momentum by rigorously focusing it toward action in the next era of our efforts.



Law Firms

Strengthen Law Firm Culture

- ❑ Create an environment in which minorities are valued and included in all aspects of client service and internal networks. Include women of color in key committees, firm programs, client pitches, and day-to-day client relationships, and demonstrate a top-down commitment to inclusion and advancement of all.
- ❑ Value each lawyer as an individual. Recognize that women of color do not always want to shoulder the burdens of being the “standard bearer” of their race or gender, especially without recognition or leadership from the top.
- ❑ Implement the firm’s commitment to diversity at all stages — recruiting, hiring, training and professional development, evaluations, compensation, and promotions.
- ❑ In recruiting, evaluate the capabilities and talents of all candidates in a comprehensive way by looking beyond grades to consider their total work and life accomplishments and talents.
- ❑ Organize outreach events and opportunities for informal interaction inside and outside the firm to cultivate organic relationships.
- ❑ In organizing internal and client events, ensure that the theme and focus are not geared solely to the interests of the majority to the discomfort of women of color and other minorities.

- ❑ Seek to eliminate micro-inequities by acknowledging them and changing the focus of the firm’s diversity efforts. Implement micro-inequities training that allows individuals to reflect on their behaviors and their reactions to particular situations, and provide strategies for correcting previously unexamined biases.
- ❑ Evaluate the effectiveness of the firm’s diversity program by looking at, and beyond, the numbers. Ask women of color about their perspective on the firm’s training, evaluation, compensation, and other structures, and their experiences at the firm in all respects.
- ❑ Support efforts by bar associations and other outside organizations addressing issues of diversity generally and the advancement and retention of women of color specifically.

Revisit and Re-evaluate Law Firm Leadership Structures

- ❑ Target and promote women of color to leadership positions in practice groups and firm decision-making.
- ❑ Identify and groom individual women of color for key roles in client relationships and firm leadership.
- ❑ Implement a means of obtaining accurate data about why women of color leave the firm to avoid assumptions that support the “party line.”

- ❑ Place greater individual accountability and responsibility on supervisors for achieving results in advancing and retaining women of color. Develop metrics to monitor progress.
- ❑ Train partners on supervisory and project management skills, including feedback, delegation, and mentoring.
- ❑ Revisit the existing diversity committee or initiative structure to ensure that it has the leadership and power necessary to be successful.
- ❑ Equalize work on firm committees and assign credit for it, especially if some lawyers do more than “their share.” Ask women of color if they wish to participate in such roles, instead of expecting them to work on the “soft issues” of diversity, mentoring, etc., without credit.

Active Involvement in Attorney Development


- ❑ Communicate with women of color regarding their needs and experience from entry to exit.
- ❑ Improve lines of communication and strengthen practice group structures. Ensure that practice-related information is disseminated through organized settings, rather than informal meetings and through casual or “face time” moments.
- ❑ Increase transparency so that all associates know what the firm expects of them. Identify and communicate systematically the skills and capabilities that are key to advancement, and monitor assignments and evaluations to ensure

that women of color get equal opportunity and guidance to develop the necessary skills and capabilities. Offer broader skills-based training, including networking, business development skills, and practice group procedures and protocols.

- ❑ Collect objective statistics on women of color in client relationships and business development opportunities. Hold practice group managers accountable for inclusion.
- ❑ Measure access to high-quality assignments and implement systems to ensure equal access for all lawyers.
- ❑ Monitor the evaluation process to ensure that all attorneys receive productive, timely, and substantive performance evaluations. Consider appointing a partner of appropriate seniority and mind set to review all written evaluations for hidden bias and to engage in candid evaluation discussions.
- ❑ Work to develop a meaningful mentoring program and regularly assess its effectiveness by soliciting and encouraging input from women of color.

Clients

- ❑ Articulate your company’s diversity initiatives and imperatives to outside counsel.
- ❑ Communicate directly with women of color assigned to your outside legal teams. Personally invite women of color assigned to your outside legal teams to participate in meetings and teleconferences.

- 
- ❑ Monitor the role of women of color in your legal matters. Hold firms accountable for the meaningful integration and substantive involvement of women of color beyond just the marketing pitch.
 - ❑ Maintain a visible and vocal presence in law school and bar association trainings geared toward client development and client management skills.
 - ❑ Reach out to the legal community and engage in candid discussions on issues of diversity and inclusion.

Lawyers

Early and Active Career Management

- ❑ Be proactive and persistent. Ask for what you want.
- ❑ Set professional goals, reassess them periodically, and stick to them.
- ❑ Begin managing your career actively from day one. Have a five-year, ten-year, and longer career plan.
- ❑ Focus early on developing internal relationships and reputation. The first weeks at a law firm are critical to maximizing your opportunities for success.

- ❑ Approach work as a chance to build a “line of credit” with partners. Build an internal clientele at the firm. Develop a constituency of partners who rely on your work and attract business internally.
- ❑ Be an active firm citizen. Stay educated regarding firm and practice group developments, such as new matters and the steps to advancement in the firm. Be proactive in seeking out interesting projects, initiatives, programs, and committees at the firm.
- ❑ Proactively seek out high-quality assignments. Talk to attorneys who have a few more years of seniority and experience to understand what constitutes a good assignment in each practice and at each level in the path toward advancement.

Excel in Core Skill Areas

- ❑ Understand the core skills that the firm values at each career phase and proactively work to obtain high-quality assignments that develop those skills.
- ❑ Never underestimate the importance of doing top quality work. The most important component of partnership is delivery of excellent work and client satisfaction.
- ❑ Learn the business of law as well as legal skills.

- ❑ Step out of your comfort zone and highlight the skills and value that you bring to the table and ask for the assignments or projects that you need to move forward.

Learn Business Development

- ❑ Seek opportunities to learn concrete business development skills early and often. Develop an internal clientele as an associate to practice these skills, in addition to obtaining the best assignments and developing valuable relationships.
- ❑ Proactively manage client relationships. Be very sensitive to client interests and needs. Be proactive in telling clients what you can do for them. Likewise, proactively ask the client what they need, how you can better serve them, etc.
- ❑ Cross-market with colleagues because work is often bequeathed in the firm and it is easier to develop business from existing clients.

Cultivate a Broad Support Network

- ❑ Identify individuals with a high level of stature or business in the firm who have credibility and capital at the partnership table. Cultivate relationships with these potential sponsors; keep them informed of your progress, needs, ambitions, and goals. Ask them for the hard facts regarding the business case for advancement in the firm.
- ❑ Seek mentors of all backgrounds and levels of seniority both inside and outside the firm. Nurture


these relationships. Look beyond other women of color for mentors. Mentors can evaluate your work product and intervene on your behalf to obtain constructive feedback.

- ❑ Find a broader sense of belonging outside your firm through bar associations and affinity groups. Be persistent in networking and other opportunities for professional development and advancement.
- ❑ Think above and below. Keep an eye out for promising young associates and aspiring law students with whom you can develop meaningful work and social relationships. One day they will be leaders, rainmakers, and clients.

Agitate for Positive Change Individually and Institutionally

- ❑ Seek to eliminate inequities in your firm and in your community. Rather than giving up, seek alliances with individuals at your firm who are promoting inclusion as a means to contribute to firm growth.
- ❑ If possible, package messages in a business context. Agitate for change and present arguments to the firm in logical ways — in terms of success and business — to strengthen opportunities for advancement.
- ❑ Initiate your own programs and invitations.
- ❑ Expect adversity and persevere. All associates and partners encounter challenges and issues in





their careers. Analyze and identify the problems, pick your battles, and recognize that not every problem is the end of the road at that firm.

Law Schools

- ❑ Educate law students, especially women and people of color, holistically about the practice of law, including the business aspects of the law, networking, and cultivating client relationships.
- ❑ Establish partnerships between law school affinity groups and employers.
- ❑ Sensitize students to issues of importance to women of color in practice to prepare students for professional transitions.
- ❑ Communicate with law firms about the school's law students. Find out what skills-based and business development training firms value and law schools can provide.
- ❑ Coordinate with bar associations and other groups that are promoting inclusion and have developed skills training.

Bar Associations

Lead the Way for Law Firms with Valuable Information and Resources

- ❑ Model the principles in this Report. Engage in self-analysis to ensure that women of color are represented in the leadership of the organization.

- ❑ Communicate the “business case” for improved retention and advancement of women of color and other “out-groups.”
- ❑ Track and publicize best practices to facilitate professional collaboration.
- ❑ Lead discussions and stimulate thinking regarding the effectiveness of law firm structures.
- ❑ Provide opportunities for informal dialogue among senior partners to share best practices and learn from the successes of their peers.
- ❑ Endeavor to provide objective data on retention statistics, compensation, and other metrics.
- ❑ Issue reports and develop programs addressing retention and advancement issues.

Provide an Avenue for Support and Development to Individual Attorneys

- ❑ Elevate women of color to leadership positions.
- ❑ Offer opportunities and programs for women of color to develop leadership skills and external mentoring relationships.
- ❑ Train practicing attorneys about skills for success, such as business development and networking.
- ❑ Develop and provide skills training programs for lawyers at all levels of seniority that can be provided to law schools and students, and packaged to law firms.

Appendix A - WBA Informal Web-based Survey (selected results)²⁵

The WBA conducted its survey at the recommendation of its Advisory Board, to obtain metrics to inform the discussion at the Summit. There were 69.4% women respondents and, of that group, 6.5% were Asian American, 10.7% were Black or African American, and 3.5% were Hispanic or Latino. Of the respondents, 53% were law firm associates and 31.6% were law firm partners. The respondents who worked in the principal office of their firm comprised 50% of the total and more than 40% worked in firms with fewer than 500 attorneys.

- Many responding associates reported that they were planning to leave their current firms in the next five years. Of those associates, 6.7% were Asian American and 18.3% were Black or African American. Those planning to leave with 6 to 10 years out of law school were 30%. Associates planning to leave their firm with less than three years out of law school came in at 45%.
- Of the attorneys reporting an intent to leave their current positions, 41% were single without children, indicating family concerns are not a primary driver of attrition. Leaving for better hours was the reason that 69% reported and approximately 75% pointed to a sense of alienation or exclusion in their workplace.
- With respect to the issue of alienation and exclusion, more than 90% of African American or black women reported feelings of alienation or exclusion at their jobs, and more than 60% also reported plans to leave their jobs within five years. Approximately 67% of Asian American women reported feelings of alienation and exclusion, but their desire to leave was less intense, with only 44% planning to leave; however, 44% reported that they were undecided about whether they would leave or stay. Of white women, 60.4% reported feeling alienated, and more than 50% were undecided about leaving within 5 years.
- Of female associates planning to stay at their current position, 86% agreed that their employers had a clear understanding of their career goals, while 81.3% of those planning to leave disagreed with that statement.
- Of those planning to stay, 88% had received constructive evaluations, while 62.8% of those planning to leave believed they had not. Associates planning to stay were also more likely to understand the core competencies for someone in their position. They also were more likely to report that they understood what it took to be promoted, and that they were able to obtain work assignments from a variety of different, senior-level attorneys. Only 14.3% of the associates who planned to stay reported a sense of alienation or exclusion at work.

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- American Institute for Managing Diversity: www.aimd.org.
- Catalyst: www.catalystwomen.org.
- Lawyers for One America: www.lawyersforoneamerica.org.

Appendix C - Summit Speakers and Facilitators

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Appendix D - Endnotes

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2 Minority Corporate Counsel Association ("MCCA"), *The Myth of the Meritocracy: A Report on the Bridges and Barriers to Success in Large Law Firms*, "Different Experiences," at 33 ("Purple Book") (available at www.mcca.com).

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9 *See id.*

10 *Id.*

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25 Requests for permission to use the data should be directed to the President, Women's Bar Association of the District of Columbia, 2020 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 446, Washington, DC 20006 (202-639-8880).

Appendix E - Sponsor Recognition

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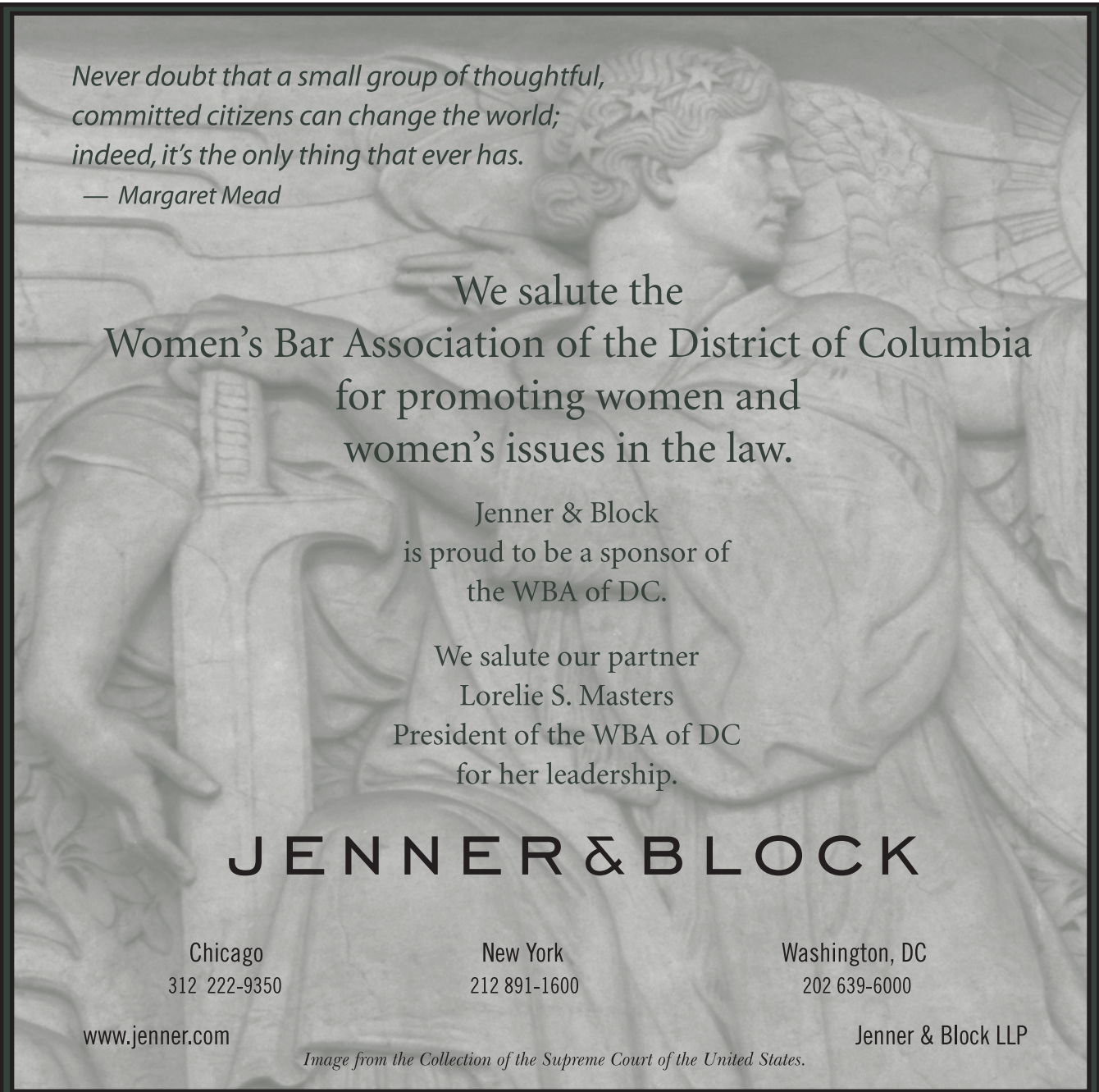
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