

## **Leadership and Accountability: Essential Ingredients for Sustainable Change**

Strong leadership is critical for creating lasting change in organizations and establishing an inclusive work environment. Yet, leadership is an elusive element posing challenges for individuals and organizations uncertain about how to cultivate diversity leaders. In addition, many organizations struggle with how to meaningfully hold leaders and managers accountable for diversity efforts, particularly within a partnership structure.

In June, the Association presented two diversity events. On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, the New York City Bar hosted a roundtable discussion attended by 17 managing partners from leading law firms. Philip Laskawy, the former chairman of Ernst & Young, and Deborah Holmes, Americas Director of the Center for the New Workforce at Ernst & Young, shared their experiences as architects of the firm's women's retention initiative. Later that month, at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Diversity Symposium, Ms. Holmes was joined on a panel by: Edwin Bowman of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP; Amy Schulman of DLA Piper Rudnick Gray Cary; and P.D. Villarreal of Schering Plough.

### **Essentials for Diversity Leadership**

It is important to recognize that leaders can be found throughout the organization, and successful diversity efforts empower and cultivate champions at all levels. However, it is particularly important for the senior leadership to be seen as true leaders of a diversity effort. Diversity training and executive coaching can be mechanisms for setting the expectations of each leader's role with respect to the overarching diversity initiative. Participants in the two events shared key leadership actions to foster a successful diversity effort:

#### **1. Listen and learn**

To be an effective leader it is important to understand the challenges faced by different groups in your organization. These barriers often go unnoticed by members of a majority group who have never experienced being an outsider in their profession. Regularly reach out to a diverse array of attorneys by hosting coffees and candid conversation with a rotating selection of attorneys. Leaders can also seek out "reverse mentors," who they feel comfortable with, to help them understand first-hand the experiences of someone from a different background in the organization.

#### **2. Regularly communicate the importance of diversity**

Successful diversity efforts have leaders who discuss the importance of diversity every chance they get, communicating their commitment to diversity through speeches, newsletter articles, memos, remarks at meetings and even during casual conversations. Leaders can be instrumental in helping others understand the connection between firm performance and progress on diversity. Furthermore, it is beneficial for leaders to acknowledge and reward those who contribute to diversity efforts.

#### **3. Be a role model**

Leaders “walk the talk.” It is not just what leaders say, it is how they act that signals whether diversity is truly important at the firm. For example, leaders can demonstrate that mentoring is valued by personally mentoring someone from a different background. In addition, it is powerful for leaders to openly and honestly discuss how they manage their work and personal lives. A managing partner at the June 2<sup>nd</sup> roundtable discussion described how a firm leader went to see his son’s soccer game after a 2 p.m. meeting, knowing that his colleagues would assume he was going to another meeting. Later, he realized that he should be honest about where he was going to set the example that flexibility is possible.

#### **4. Invest**

As with any important initiative, resources are necessary to make change. Hiring qualified diversity professionals, retaining an external consultant to conduct interviews and surveys of attorneys, and providing annual training sessions are all significant expenditures that are essential to successful diversity efforts. In addition, providing scholarships, sponsoring minority bar associations, and hosting diversity receptions are important ways to recruit diverse talent.

#### **5. Hold yourself and others accountable for diversity**

Holding leaders accountable for diversity within the partnership model is a significant challenge, particularly with respect to tying partner compensation to diversity efforts. However, accountability is an evolutionary process, beginning with systematically making the case that diversity was beneficial to the firm’s and individual partner’s bottom-line. When individual partners are not participating, the managing partner can make a personal call to urge them to fulfill their diversity obligations. From the top down, starting with the management committee, compensation can be tied to management issues, including the recruitment, retention, and advancement of diverse talent. However, it is essential that effort, not just numbers, is rewarded.

To learn more please visit our Web site at [www.nycbar.org](http://www.nycbar.org) or contact Meredith Moore, director of the New York City Bar’s Office for Diversity at [mmoore@nycbar.org](mailto:mmoore@nycbar.org).