

Finding a Voice for Women of Color at Law Firms: Unique Challenges and Collaborative Solutions Panel and Networking Event

“Top Priorities for Law Firms and Women of Color”

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January 16, 2007

Suggestions for Firms – A Top Ten List:

1. Review all systems in the firm, including recruiting, acceptance, and retention rates to see if they have a disproportionately negative impact on Women of Color (WOC).
2. Develop critical mass: Having more WOC will make the firm more hospitable to incoming WOC and provide a variety of role models.
3. Encourage WOC to develop their leadership potential through activities outside of the firm, such as bar association involvement, teaching CLE courses, and engaging in community service and outreach.
4. Give WOC more responsibilities by placing them on key committees. Do not put all WOC on the same committee and do not put them only on diversity-related committees – groom them and include them on the power committees, such as compensation, management, and executive committees.
5. Make sure assignments are dispersed fairly and that WOC have a fair chance to compete for substantive, meaningful work assignments.
6. Make sure performance evaluations are fair and fairly implemented. Bonuses, compensation, and advancement decisions should be free of gender and racial/ethnic bias – intentional or unintentional.
7. Make sure WOC are given equal access to formal and informal networking opportunities and the chance to interact with clients, both professionally and socially.
8. Provide and encourage effective mentoring at all levels: great mentors are an important key to success, yet seem harder to find for WOC.
9. Communicate firm leaders' commitment to diversity and inclusion to the entire firm, regularly and repeatedly, until these concepts become ingrained into the culture of the firm.

10. Measure progress periodically toward the goals of diversity and inclusion, assess the effectiveness of current efforts, and develop strategies to address areas that need improvement.

Suggestions for Women of Color – A Top 8 List:

1. Develop your interpersonal skills: you will always need them in every setting.
2. Develop strong communication skills – a lawyer's stock in trade.
3. Develop your leadership skills, and lead with energy and passion.
4. Always maintain your integrity.
5. Produce results: Get work done in a timely manner and do it well.
6. Develop time management skills.
7. Have a good sense of humor - and the flexibility and resiliency to overcome barriers and challenges.
8. Have faith in yourself and take good care of your health.