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Diversity Matters: ABA LPM Section Addresses Firm Management's Role

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Diversity Matters

BY JOAN R. M. BULLOCK

ABA LPM Section Addresses Firm Management's Role

A Latino attorney laments that he doesn't receive substantive work and is merely window dressing for the firm. A female lawyer returns from maternity leave and worries that she is off the partner track. An Asian-American lawyer is dissatisfied that, despite doing good work, his ability to enter the leadership pipeline appears obstructed.

A newly minted lawyer asserts with frustration that the only opportunities available for African-American lawyers are staff attorney positions. In response, some white male colleagues believe that the problems these lawyers present are the result of their not doing what is required to succeed in the firm. Others believe that some were hired only for their diverse backgrounds.

Who is right? Who is wrong? Arguably, it doesn't matter because the *perceptions* of each are real. It is these perceptions that the firm must address so that everyone's contributions to the firm's mission and bottom line are acknowledged and valued. Ensuring that everyone is regarded as a strategic team player, worthy of respect and professional cooperation, is an obligation of the firm's leadership. This obligation is met through developing and implementing a management process that promotes diversity and inclusiveness as a cultural imperative within the firm. In turn, this process should enlighten and guide employees to give the best of themselves and expect the best of others so that the firm can give and be the best to its clients.



Pursuing a Vital Enterprise

The ABA Law Practice Management Section recognizes the importance of this inclusionary component of the management process and sees how, as a non-practice-specific Section, it is uniquely positioned to be a resource and a champion of the values of diversity, with both stability and longevity, to different entities. That is why the LPM Management Core Group Standing Committee on Diversity was created—with the mission of institutionalizing the business, ethical, and cultural value associated with diversity in the legal workplace, the LPM Section and the ABA. The committee has two primary goals:

1. Raising the profile of diversity as an imperative within the LPM Section and the profession; and

2. Creating a formalized and institutionalized outreach to diversity entities within and external to the ABA.

In this regard, the committee has already undertaken several initiatives. For one, it partnered with KM Advisors and provided an interactive program during LPM's Fall 2007 Meeting in Puerto Rico that allowed participants the chance to learn, share, and experience diversity, inclusion and leadership strategies for the 21st century. The committee also held panel discussions with corporate counsel and law firm partners on diversity and inclusion at the ABA 2007 Annual Meeting in San Francisco and at LPM's annual marketing conference last November.

Looking forward, the committee has an ambitious agenda for expanding its work, including continuing its partnering efforts with various ABA entities to highlight diversity issues; developing more structured relationships with minority bars; and establishing an award that calls attention to and rewards diversity initiatives and processes in the legal workplace.

To learn more about the committee, please visit www.lawpractice.org. **LP**

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NETWORKING RECEPTION

Join ABA Women Rainmakers and the LPM Standing Committee on Diversity for a reception during the ABA Annual Meeting, August 8, from 4 to 6 p.m. at the Sheraton New York.