

2012



diversity report

The publication
highlighting diversity and
inclusion initiatives at
K&L Gates LLP.

K&L GATES



Client Q&A with Laurie Robinson

CEO and Founder, Corporate Counsel Women of Color® and Senior Vice President and Assistant General Counsel, CBS Corporation



K&L Gates interviewed the founder of one of the largest organizations of diverse female lawyers in the world to learn about what she is doing to support the career development of members.

What was the impetus for founding Corporate Counsel Women of Color (CCWC)® and why was it important to you to have a global membership?

I started working in New York City as a new lawyer in 1998. The legal profession has been slowly evolving in the area of diversity, but in general, there was little diversity in law firms and that really bothered me. Women of color lawyers that I knew saw few people of color in their corporations and desired a way to connect with people of similar backgrounds and experiences.

We were also scattered throughout the city, so oftentimes we did not see or have contact with other diverse lawyers working at other companies. There was a small group that would network at informal dinners. I collected the business cards of those women and decided to create a directory of women of color working in corporate legal departments.

The goal was to have a resource readily available so we could find, reach out, and connect with one another. Initially, I started with approximately 10 names. Within two weeks, through word of mouth about the project, the list grew to 50 names. I remember how shocked and amazed I was that we found 50 women of color lawyers in corporations in New York City. Word about

the effort continued to build, and we then found about 600 people around the United States. In 2004, my former employer provided pro bono legal services and helped me incorporate the organization as a nonprofit 501(c) (3) organization.

Today, we now have more than 2,700 women of color lawyers who work primarily for Fortune 1000 and Forbes 2000 companies around the globe.

In 2005, CCWC® held its first international career strategies symposium in Paris. In subsequent years, we've held symposiums in London, Paris, Singapore, Dubai, South Africa, and in February 2012, we had our sixth annual symposium in São Paulo, Brazil.

We have had hundreds of women of color lawyers, 98 percent of the attendees being from those regions, who have attended our events.

What I noticed was that though these women were from different parts of the world, they, like the women of color in the United States, wanted the same exact things: to grow, develop, have equal opportunities and access, and overcome the glass ceiling in their organizations.



Is how we view diversity in the United States relevant on a global basis, and if so, why?

Diversity is smart business. It brings different viewpoints and accelerates innovation outcomes. In the United States, the combined buying power (disposable income) of racial minorities is estimated to rise to more than \$2 trillion by 2015.

Companies who are not marketing to these groups, or developing products for these groups, are leaving opportunities on the table. In the 21st century most successful companies have operations, goods, and customers in other parts of the world. It is critical to engage and include the perspectives of many people from multiple backgrounds to understand the issues and fine tune the products to maximize services and profits.

In light of globalization, companies cannot afford to have a homogeneous group sitting around a conference room table someplace in the United States thinking of all the ideas and making all of the decisions. If they do, they will miss out. The smart way to do it is to have the conference with diverse lawyers included in the discussion, and a videoconference to the diverse lawyers in the other parts of the globe to utilize varied perspectives.

In your experience with CCWC®, what are the greatest concerns and obstacles shared by CCWC® members?

In our groundbreaking research report "Perspectives of Women of Color in Corporate Legal Departments," our members expressed that they aspired to the positions of chief legal officer, division general counsel, and/or head of a business unit.

Despite these high career aspirations, the majority noted that they did not believe or know whether they were part of the company's succession plan or being groomed to head a department, business unit, or division.

What our members are looking for are avenues where they can grow and develop their skills and talents, and be in line for leadership positions within their corporations. This year at the CCWC® and K&L Gates 8th Annual Career Strategies Conference, we will launch for the very first time the General Counsel Training Boot Camp. In this hands-on program, we will cover corporations, mergers and acquisitions, labor, employment, litigation, and intellectual property. We will also launch the CCWC® MBA in a Day for Lawyers where attendees will be exposed to accounting and financial statement concepts in the M&A context. These programs will add to our members' portfolio of skills.

We will provide supplemental training sessions during 2013 to help to meet their needs.

Client Q&A with Laurie Robinson (cont.)

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What successful diversity strategies have you seen corporations utilize that law firms could emulate?

Last year, CCWC® awarded American Airlines with its Diversity Award of Excellence. American Airlines' legal department provides a good example of how to give all lawyers equal opportunity and access to training, development, mentorship, and connections with senior management. The company offers a one-year rotational assignment program, which provides lawyers the opportunity to work, and gain knowledge in a new area of expertise.

In addition, Gary Kennedy, general counsel of American Airlines, encourages cross-section lunches, where different practice groups within the organization have lunch to encourage morale and collegiality among peers. American Airlines further sponsors high-talent lawyers, including diverse women lawyers, to participate in leadership development programs.

Law firms can do the same. By providing lawyers with access and exposure to diverse practice areas, — employment, privacy, labor, litigation, intellectual property, etc. — it can only help to build and strengthen their skills which will ultimately make them better lawyers and help them to maximize the services offered to clients.

How can corporations and law firms best develop their diverse talent?

I strongly believe that if lawyers have access, exposure, and developmental opportunities they will be strong assets within their companies. Utilization studies indicate that diverse lawyers are underutilized in their work assignments. One way to ensure equal opportunity is to monitor the workload and workflow of all lawyers to ensure that substantive work is distributed equally.

Also, law firms can support lawyers in their career development by supporting their attendance at leadership conferences, seminars, and executive leadership programs, and by conducting in-house CLEs on developments in the law, and by providing regular feedback.

Finally, corporations can develop talent by assigning them to executive job coaches with a curriculum and course work to enhance skills critical to the corporation. ■