

Minority Female Attorneys Form Networking Group

There are more African American women attorneys today than ever before. Yet, many challenges remain for Black women as they try to progress from mere staff members to the top lawyers for major corporations. Some believe that the lack of access to mentors and little, if any, contacts for potential business have stagnated their legal careers.

Laurie Robinson, an assistant general counsel for nearly three years for CBS Broadcasting Inc., in New York City, wanted to do something about that. She found the isolation of

Corporate Counsel symbolizes how far we've come as real movers and shakers.

working in the corporate environment challenging and a potential obstacle to her career success.

"In the corporate structure, there are not that many women of color in the aggregate," says Robinson, 32. "If you have people who resemble you, who are doing great things, and offer encouragement and guidance for your career, then you have a benchmark for what to achieve."

The 1998 graduate of Indiana University School of Law at Bloomington began compiling a directory of minority female attorneys so they could have access to each other as resources for job opportunities and, most importantly, mentorship.

In 2004, she formed Corporate Counsel Women of Color, a nonprofit organization of primarily Black female attorneys who serve as legal counsel to corporations.

In January, the group celebrated its launch in New York, where members were welcomed by Mayor Michael Bloomberg. In just over a year, the informal group of 20 meeting for occasional dinners in New York City had grown to more than 700 members from all across the country, as well as Canada, Asia and Europe.

Attorney Lisa Boykin, director of business and legal affairs for domestic television at Paramount Pictures, says that Corporate Counsel was a much-needed organization and "symbolizes just how far we've come in terms of not just having a token presence in corporate America, but becoming real movers and shakers in the legal profession."

This fall the group will have its first Career Strategies Conference in New York City. Robinson says the event will address the organization's goal of promoting career advancement and increased diversity in the legal profession.

"We're looking to provide women of color the strategies and skills for taking their careers to the next level: moving from corporate counsel to general counsel, positioning one's self to sit on Fortune 500 boards, transitioning from the law to the business side and negotiating salaries."

— Alicia Young

VERBATIM

Well, [I'm] a little short on money these days, you know?

Government pay."

— President Bush touting his Social Security privatization plan at a rally in Louisville, Ky., on March 10.