



## Article

### Deploying Diversity

*The in-house bar should step up and make diversity a legal department priority.*

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Published in the [10/1/2008 Issue of InsideCounsel](#).

Nowhere has diversity been more prominent than in this year's presidential election process thanks to the candidates: a septuagenarian (Sen. John McCain), an African-American (Sen. Barack Obama), a Hispanic (Governor Bill Richardson), a female (Sen. Hillary Clinton) and a Mormon (Gov. Mitt Romney). All of these individuals were qualified and brought a rich and innovative thought process to how to make this country and world better. Notably, the two leading Democratic candidates during the primary both were lawyers.

Diversity--a voluntary measure put into effect in workplaces, educational institutions, major corporations and businesses--is as needed today as it was 20 years ago. When it comes to diversity, the 2000 U.S. Census reveals that the legal profession lags behind all other professions. There are more minority doctors, engineers and civil service workers in the U.S. than there are minority lawyers. It is time for the legal profession to stop plodding around and pick up the pace.

Today, profitable companies understand the importance of selling their goods and services to diverse consumers across multiple platforms. For instance, cosmetic companies historically sold products targeting only Caucasian women. Once they realized that women of color also wear makeup, they started developing makeup to meet the needs of the untapped market. Thereby, they were able to increase their profits.

The evolution of the American grocery store is another great example of the impact of diversification. As a child growing up in the early 1980s, I remember being limited to a small selection of frozen food items such as Swanson TV dinners. Today, offerings are available from around the globe including Asian, Indian and Thai frozen food. Even the tastes of born-and-bred Americans reflect cultural differences such as Southern or Western cuisine. By meeting the needs of its consumers, stores have been able to improve margins and satisfy the needs of its base.

The legal profession should be no different. A diverse profession at the highest levels of decision making can create a business that is more relevant, competitive and satisfying to the customers. The bottom line is that law firms, major corporations and educational institutions must reflect the market at large, their clients and their clients' customers. Everyone in the legal field must work together to bring more diversity to the profession and stop the bleeding of the high attrition rates.

In a law firm or legal department, a lawyer can get the feel of the culture through observation alone. When the workplace is rich in diversity, the overpowering message is that all employees are valued and have a chance to go as far as their drive, initiative, creativity and aspirations will carry them. They can grow through mentorship from workers who can pull their coattails when they are erring or give them encouragement when they are excelling. A diverse workplace brings out the very best in everyone. It also inspires, energizes and motivates.

The bottom line is still money. When the legal department becomes a revolving door, money and time are lost by having to constantly train new workers. This results in a loss of work consistency and does not give employees enough time to buy into the company's goals and mission.

As the nation continues to become more diverse, companies interested in maximizing profits will need to step up to the plate, be counted and require accountability. It is mandatory that lawyers step up to the bar as leaders in augmenting the necessary changes to make diversity a reality. As the profession mandated with upholding the laws and assuring rights of constituents, the legal profession should be in the forefront for diversity implementation and serve as a model for the rest of the nation.

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