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The 2008 election sets an example for diversity in corporate America.

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Election 2008 gave many Americans something to feel good about. Record numbers of voters cast ballots for an African-American man running for president and a woman running for vice president.

Barack Obama's historic election victory—as the first black U.S. president—has some people flirting with two ideas: One, America is now post-racial; and two, America has evolved into a colorblind society. Within these lines of conjecture, one may ask, "With an African-American man holding the highest office in the land, is there really still a continued need for diversity

initiatives in corporate America?" I respond with an emphatic "yes!" Taking a page from Election 2008 will provide a roadmap for driving diversity in the legal community.

In the first year, President Obama and his administration face the challenge of fixing the crumbling economy, calming global unrest and bailing out major corporations and financial institutions. To tackle these seemingly insurmountable tasks, President Obama did not go with a homogeneous team that would bring about one-dimensional ideas or solutions. For his Cabinet selections, he nominated highly qualified individuals who represent the varied complexion and pulse of America. This diverse team fosters a think tank of creativity to solve the unprecedented challenges of this era.

At the same time, a look at the makeup of law firms and corporate legal departments suggests that diversity in the legal community is progressing at a snail's pace. Studies indicate that in major cities, there are several law firms that have one or no partners of color. In corporate law departments of Fortune 500 companies, a small percentage of men and women of color are serving in the top position—general counsel.

Far too many lawyers whose votes contributed to the results of Election 2008 believe that with their votes, they have shown their openness to diversity and have no more to do. They will not go back to their law firms and/or corporate legal departments and think, "Does my division reflect a diversity similar to the highest office in the land? Do we as a department have people of color and women in significant executive and decision-making roles? Are we getting varied opinions from a workforce that reflects the society within which we live?"

With the worldwide financial crisis impacting both Wall Street and Main Street, law firms and corporate legal departments will be challenged to find ways to better service their clients during these critical times. The legal community, just like the automotive, real estate, financial and insurance industries, must take steps to initiate every creative, state-of-the-art and imaginative proposal to stay afloat.

Taking a page from Election 2008, corporate and law firm leaders must proactively work to employ diverse lawyers—men and women—at the highest levels. By doing so, they maximize their potential in meeting the needs of their diverse clientele and sharpen their edge against global competition. Concepts from diverse leaders may stimulate new products for untapped markets that heretofore had not been considered.

I have written often that as the profession mandated with upholding the laws and assuring rights of constituents, the legal profession should be at the forefront of diversity implementation. Thus, the clarion call from Election 2008 is clear: America is more than ready to move beyond race and gender to put the right people in office if it benefits them. Law firms and corporations must operate from a similar premise. These times are unpredictable and unsettling. It is time for lawyers to use their individual and collective leadership to develop and mandate initiatives that will drive diversity—full steam ahead in the 21st century.

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