

Providing support network to women attorneys of color worldwide for the past 17 years- Corporate Counsel Women of Color



Providing support network to women attorneys of color worldwide for the past 17 years- Corporate Counsel Women of Color

Despite the increased emphasis on diversity and inclusion within the legal field over the past decade, the legal profession remains one of the least diverse of any discipline. According to the American Bar Association's (ABA) National Lawyer Population Survey, women made up just 35 percent of the legal profession in 2017. The numbers paint an even bleaker picture of ethnic and racial diversity in the legal field. Minority populations of color remain woefully underrepresented in the legal.

There have been decades of diversity efforts, and studies have shown, time and time again, that diversity is good for business. Amid the silence emanating from the gender and ethnic minority community and rising lie— a giant from the shadows— the Corporate Counsel Women of Color, an organization exclusively dedicated to women attorneys of color. The Corporate Counsel Women of Color is a non-profit organization of women attorneys of color who for Forbes 2000 companies, Fortune 1000 companies, not-for-profit corporations, and various other entities. The group is represented in over 900 airlines, automotive, apparel, banking, beverage, computer, cosmetic, construction, defense, energy, entertainment, financial, and various other industries.

Following are excerpts from the conversation with Mrs. Laurie N. Robinson Haden, Founder, President, and CEO of Corporate Counsel Women of Color

Q. What is the aim of Corporate Counsel Women of Color?

Launched in 2004, Corporate Counsel Women of Color(CCWC) provides a support network to in-house women attorneys of color. The CCWC promotes career advancement and the success of in-house women attorneys of color at all levels within corporations and promotes all aspects of global diversity in the legal profession and at workplaces.

Q. Could you tell us a bit about the organization's journey so far?

I founded CCWC in 2004 to advance women attorneys of color and to foster diversity in the legal profession. CCWC was an idea that I brought to life as I sat in front of a laptop with dial-up internet in my kitchen in Harlem after having dinner with ten of my friends in New York City.

I've never seen so many people looking for information on career development, negotiations, and how to build wealth for the future. Many of these women are the first in their families to go to college, so insight and guidance have helped them tremendously.

The organization's goal is to create a readily available resource to find, reach out, and connect. There were no social media outlets back then like Facebook or LinkedIn, but the news about the effort spread by word of mouth. I put together a list of contact names and contact information of the women of color in-house legal counsels that we knew. The list continues to grow from there. Today we have over 4,700 in-house legal counsel members globally.

In 2012, I hosted CCWC Live Blog Talk and spoke at Bar Associations around the country, including the America Bar Association and the National Bar Association. I spent much time giving visibility to the organization by writing for several legal-related publications, such as Inside Counsel magazine and CBS Corporation's Diversity Blog.

Simultaneously, I launched CCWC's "International Career Strategies Symposium," "One-Day Career Strategies Conference for Law Firm Associates," "My Life as a Lawyer" for law students at Southern University Law Center, and the "Corporate Counsel Men of Color's Career/Life Strategies Conference" for professional men of color.

In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, I transformed our annual Career Strategies Conference into a virtual one, with more than 100 presenters, and five straight days of programming of various events, including participants from companies that include Google, Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, and The Home Depot. We reached a record attendance in 2020 of nearly 1,500 attendees.

We celebrate CCWC's 18th anniversary and host the Annual Career Strategies Conferences in Atlanta this year. We will continue to have a virtual component to the Conference for those who still want to attend remotely.

Q. Who can join your organization? What are the requisites?

CCWC accepts all attorneys globally who possess a Juris Doctorate Degree (or international equivalent) and engage in the practice of law and work at a Fortune 1000 company, Forbes 2000 company, or not-for-profit corporation; and/or governmental agency or serves in the capacity of a Judge. Prospective members should also have a strong interest and willingness to network and develop relationships with in-house women attorneys of color around the globe.

Q. What are the benefits of being a member of your organization?

CCWC membership offers several wonderful benefits! They include access to the Career Strategies Conference, access to the weekly e-Newsletter job postings, an opportunity to enroll

in the CCWC Premier Rewards Program, and discounts for Executive Education Programs through eCornell and Women in the Boardroom and more.

Q. How do you encourage entrepreneurship?

CCWC is launching a new initiative for minority women entrepreneurs. The program aims to help minority women entrepreneurs maximize their full potential by pairing them with minority women lawyer-mentors. The legal volunteers will provide mentoring and business advice on issues relevant to small businesses and offer expanded networking opportunities for the entrepreneurs. The program includes educational workshops on copyright, trademarks, web design, social media, workforce management, financial statements, and more. Entrepreneurs will also receive discounts on products and services through program partners, including Legal Zoom.

In addition, program participants will be eligible to apply for grants of \$5,000 from CCWC.

Q. How does your platform help women of color find jobs that fit their particular skillset?

CCWC provides weekly job postings to Fortune 1000 and Forbes 2000 corporations and AM Law 250 Law Firms. The listserv is distributed to over 6,000 diverse lawyers in the United States and abroad. Based on the need and demand, we are launching an equivalent distribution to law firm associates and law firm partners for firm opportunities this year.

Q. What does the road ahead look like for Corporate Counsel Women of Color? What do you look forward to in 2022?

The organization is branching off into bigger and more exciting platforms. The 18th Annual Career Strategies Conference plans to have a star-studded line-up of award-winning corporate women legal giants and celebrities along with a plethora of working sessions focused on personal and professional development. We are also continuing our “Board Ready Bootcamp” and our partnership with KPMG to prepare senior attorneys for corporate board members during the Conference. We have several members already serving on Fortune 500 boards.

I’m excited to report that CCWC has a new Advisory Board of legal executives and business leaders who will help direct the organization. Furthermore, we continue to grow and expand our Pipeline Program for aspiring attorneys in high school and college. This year, we are launching our “Women of Color Entrepreneurs Mentorship Program” for minority women entrepreneurs.

We are also expanding our Sponsorship and Corporate Membership programs to allow companies and law firms to partner with CCWC to provide opportunities and resources to the diverse legal community. Along with that is the distribution of our recently expanded e-Newsletter, which contains job openings from top corporations and firms worldwide.

Q. Meet the visionary champion of diversity, inclusivity, and equality for women attorneys of color

Laurie N. Robinson Haden has received various accolades for her leadership within the legal community, including being and receiving the Women's Venture Fund's Highest Leaf Award, the Groundwork Inc. Impact Award, and others. She has been featured in the annual women's issue of Ebony Magazine in recognition of her leadership, ability to inspire others, and ability to effectuate change. She was named to the Network Journal's 40 Under Forty List and has been featured in many other prestigious magazines.

Recently, Mrs. Robinson Haden was selected as a History Maker in law and was named to Savoy magazine's list of the 2015 and 2018 Top Influential African-American Lawyers in America.

Currently, Mrs. Robinson Haden serves on Work Tribe Dynamics and Kapdec: An Academy for e-Learning boards. Mrs. Robinson Haden also serves on the board of visitors of her alma mater — Indiana University at Bloomington Mauer School of Law — and North Carolina Central University School of Law, where she co-chairs the board. Mrs. Robinson Haden served on the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund board of directors for seven years.

“Corporate Counsel Women of Color distinctiveness lies in the fact that it is the only organization in the world that is exclusively for in-house women of color.”