

DRIVING DIVERSITY

## Corporate Counsel Women of Color Survey Reveals What Women Want

Data shows women of color want to be more active in their corporations.

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By [Laurie N. Robinson](#)

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I recently wrote my Driving Diversity column about inclusion in the legal workplace being the cornerstone of diversity (see “Recognizing a Sham,” February 2011). Since that time, Corporate Counsel Women of Color launched its research study—“The Perspectives of Women of Color Attorneys in Corporate Legal Departments.” The data gathered from more than 800 women of color attorneys who work primarily for corporate legal departments provided great insight into what women of color attorneys want in their legal careers. Respondents were asked to rank several components of job satisfaction on a scale of one to five—one being most important and five being least important. “Being valued” was ranked No. 1. “Compensation” ranked No. 2. “Work assignments” ranked No. 3. “Flexible work assignments” and “upward mobility” were ranked second to last and least important, respectively.

Survey participants defined “being valued” as having an opportunity to be a decision maker and receiving feedback and rewards for excellent performance. Being valued also included collegiality and teamwork, trust and respect earned for solid legal advice, corporate values of diversity and inclusion, opportunities for professional growth, and autonomy in managing their work.

The respondents viewed career advancement as multifaceted. In addition to hard work and excellent performance, they shared that their career trajectories are dependent upon exposure to upper management, developing relationships up and down the company hierarchy, taking risks in developing new areas of practice, and acquiring knowledge related to positions outside the legal department.

Many respondents want to become a chief legal officer, division general counsel and/or head a business unit within the corporation. Others aspire to serve on boards of publicly traded corporations. In sum, their belief is that upward mobility provides them the chance to increase opportunities for others, influence policies and become a greater asset to the growth of their companies.

The takeaway from the data is that these women want to be even more active in their corporations—either in the legal department or on the business side.

The data that was not a surprise was that, although legal departments are viewed as more inclusive than law firms (where 76.5 percent of respondents started their careers), they were nonetheless minimally diverse—with Caucasian men holding top leadership positions. With so little diversity in the C-suites across America, now is the time for corporations to help women of color attorneys in their legal departments become leaders.

Legal departments can start by ensuring that women of color attorneys work on high-level assignments, interface with senior management and learn other areas of the corporation’s business. If corporations invest in this talented group of diverse women—and start today—they can increase diversity at the highest levels. Corporations should review their succession plans and assess how many diverse women of color are a part of the future in the company. If they find few are a part of this plan, they need to take another look within their law departments (or look to other corporations’ law departments to hire away diverse talent). The talent is out there and ready to be fully used.

What I found inspiring about the study was the fact that while these attorneys recognized that their legal departments were minimally diverse, they are concentrating more on their strengths. In this way, they are overcoming barriers of race, ethnicity and gender by performing at high standards and continually setting goals with expectations of being fully included in their workplaces.

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