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**Q&A WITH  
LEGAL WOMEN  
LEADERS**



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career

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FOREWORD BY LORRAINE KOC

2005-2006 PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN LAWYERS

# CBS Broadcasting Inc.

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## Laurie Nicole Robinson – Assistant General Counsel

Laurie Nicole Robinson is the assistant general counsel in the labor and employment group at CBS Broadcasting Inc. in New York City. She is also the founder and CEO of Corporate Counsel Women of Color, a nonprofit organization of nearly 1,400 women attorneys of color who work primarily for Fortune 1000 and Forbes 2000 legal departments designed to promote diversity in the legal profession. Prior to joining CBS, Ms. Robinson worked at Seyfarth Shaw LLP and Epstein, Becker and Green, P.C.

Prior to joining the law firms, Ms. Robinson worked as a legal intern in the labor management division of the National Football League in New York City.

Ms. Robinson is the author of several legal-related publications including: *Pre-Employment Personality Testing: Under the Americans With Disabilities Act, How Much Latitude Do Employers Have to Incorporate These Tests In the Hiring Practice?* (American Bar Association, 2005). Her other publications include: *Drafting An Effective Release, New York Law Journal* (October 29, 2002) and *Retail Industry Picketing and Handbilling: Rights of Non-Employee Union Representatives and Striking and Off Duty Employees to Access to Shopping Malls, Parking Fields, Stores and Other Private Property, 17 Labor Lawyer* (Summer 2001).

Ms. Robinson has been bestowed many awards for her work and spoken before several prominent organizations. In February 2006, Ms. Robinson was named a Power Broker by Inside Counsel in its GC 50 list of the most influential in-house counsel in North America. Ms. Robinson was also featured in the annual women's issue of *Ebony Magazine* (March, 2006) in recognition of her leadership and ability to inspire others. In 2005, Ms. Robinson was recognized by Coca-Cola's legal department and received the Women's Venture Fund's Highest Leaf Award and the Charting Your Own Course Spirit Award. She has also presented before the American Bar Association, the National Bar Association, the Minority Corporate Counsel Association, the South Asian Women Leaders Forum, and the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Delta G.E.M.S Women in Law and Law Enforcement Center Fair 2006.

Ms. Robinson received her BA, magna cum laude, in 1994 from North Carolina Central University. She served as a campus leader as Miss North Carolina Central University, where she provided public service to the Durham, North Carolina community, served as a national ambassador to the university and was featured in *Ebony Magazine*. She attended Indiana University School of Law-Bloomington, where she was the President of the Student Law Association, the Notes and Comments Editor of the *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* and received her JD in 1998.



## Q&A with Laurie Nicole Robinson

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### What advice would you give a young woman considering a career in the law today?

A career in the law can be very [rewarding]. The skill set obtained in the law can be transferred into multiple occupations and disciplines. I would let a young woman know that the practice of law consists of numerous areas of practice. What I would do is not focus on one discipline, but try to get a broad range of experience in various disciplines. When I was in law school,

I did different jobs that involved different areas of practice, so it helped me broaden my skills, but it also helped me narrow down what I wanted to do. So just be open and keep your mind open to broad opportunities.

**Have you personally experienced any advantages or disadvantages in the legal industry because of your gender?**

With any occupation, there exist advantages or disadvantages. There is no avoiding it. I think as a minority woman, the challenge is that there are not many diverse executives at the top. That creates challenges in finding bona fide mentors to steer you along the way. The plus, however, with being a lawyer is that you are in the driver's seat to effectuate change and create a difference in the legal profession.

**How do you balance your time between your nonprofit organization, Corporate Counsel Women of Color™ and CBS Broadcasting Inc.?**

When I was in school, I did not just go to class. I was always involved in extracurricular activities. For example, in undergraduate, I was in the University Honors Program taking a full load of courses, while writing publications and serving as a campus leader in the role of Miss North Carolina Central University. In law school, I was involved with Moot Court, served as the president of the Student Law Association, operated the student book store, and had an editorial position on the law journal. So from early on, multi-tasking has been my modus operandi. Because I am multi-dimensional, I can do my full-time [activities], and do other things in other areas that are not necessarily law-related, like marketing, public relations, programming, productions, fundraising, artwork designing, organizing, motivational speaking and persuasive writing. So all that said, that's how I do both.

I would encourage young students to practice being multi-functional and to develop all of their skills and talents that they can transfer into other areas.

The genius of Corporate Counsel Women of Color™ came about as a result of my observation that diverse lawyers were scattered throughout New York City and hence hard to find in aggregate. To remedy the situation, I compiled and self-published a directory that had people's contact names in it so that diverse people could reach out to other people with similar backgrounds. I mailed it out to people who were in the directory for free, just so they would have it. It started out with a handful of people in 2004, but now in 2006 we have grown exponentially to nearly 1,400 women attorneys of color around the globe who primarily work for Fortune 1000 and Forbes 2000 companies.

**What kind of steps have law firms and other legal employers taken in the last few years to create a better working environment for women? What else do you think needs to happen in this area?**

The legal profession is making strides slowly. I think the positive is that several legal department and law firm employers are starting to consider diversity as being important to society, the business of law and the legal profession. Although we still have a long way to go, I think the profession can improve if employers genuinely focus on all aspects of diversity — hiring, retention and advancement.

I think in order to have retention, you have to have some form of mentorship. In effect, retention will happen if companies ensure that they bring in diverse talent and effectively and efficiently utilize the people coming through the door. Also, someone within the corporate structure needs to oversee the process to ensure that diverse talent is being assigned quality and substantive work assignments and not just being assigned menial tasks. I think when you have someone overseeing and managing that process that it will lend itself to people being developed, and when people are developed, they're happy, and when they're happy, they will stay.

**What sort of structures need to be in place to increase the number of women law leaders at top law firms and in corporate counsel capacities?**

Active recruitment of diverse candidates, affirmative steps to facilitate retention and advancement, and formal mentorship programs within the structure can help achieve this goal.

**What impact has a career in law had on your personal and family life? Do you have any special techniques, methods and philosophies that help you maintain a work/life balance and be a successful lawyer?**

Everything in life happens in seasons. I am a strong believer of doing all you can while you can. Sometimes you have to juggle, but at the end of the day, you have to take affirmative steps to take time out for you or life will pass you by. Life's process is give-and-take. You can't do everything at once, but you just slowly put things on your plate that you can handle and manage. When you feel overwhelmed with too many things, do not be afraid to say "no."

**What other careers and life choices did you consider before deciding on a career in the law? If you were not practicing law and you could not be a lawyer, what would your dream career be now?**

I always wanted to practice law. That was my first and only choice. My dream job outside of law would be something creative in television programming or production.

**How do you expect the practice of law will change in the next ten years?**

Other than different changes in the law, I think if you look at the overall landscape, you're going to find people more open to diversity. I think the old-boys network will be dying out slowly, and I think the people who are coming up now are more open-minded to interacting with people with diverse backgrounds. In the next 10 years, I believe that you will find more diverse executives ascending to the top.

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***Laurie Nicole Robinson — Assistant General Counsel***