

The Legal Profession & Diversity, Part III



Prompted by corporate clients' demands, a growing number of private law firms are initiating career-development and other retention programs to keep top diverse talent—including women attorneys

When Emilia A. Quesada was a senior associate at a national law firm, she would dread the 7 p.m. phone calls from her then two-year-old asking, "Mommy, is it time to get me yet?" Quesada would cringe when her sick toddler begged her to stay home (but couldn't because of a court appearance or a deposition). And those feelings quickly turned to guilt after Quesada's second child was born.

With her career taking off and work and family demands increasing, Quesada had to find a way to

reduce the on-the-job hours required in private practice without sacrificing her career. That's when she went on a search for a family-friendly law firm, one that was committed to diversity and allowed her to continue to practice business litigation on a reduced-hour schedule. After making that decision in 2003, Quesada was immediately hired at another national, high-quality law firm in Miami, where she has practiced for more than three years.

"When I decided to reduce my hours, I was not going to settle for

anything less than what I was used to and personally required from the practice of law: a firm where I could litigate complex commercial litigation and class-action cases, and continue to represent my national clients," Quesada recalls.

For attorneys of all races and ethnicities, genders and ages, success in private practice can boil down to a pivotal decision: sacrifice personal life or find another job with more manageable hours. And many, unwilling to forfeit personal lives, are leaving the profession altogether or finding the solu-

ing business-development seminars for associates. They are also pairing women with more experienced lawyers or offering women-only networking seminars where lawyers can gain the needed experience and contacts. Other firms are holding workshops to explain to associates what milestones they

leaders and filling in gaps of their knowledge of finance and other disciplines." As part of GE's training, its lawyers meet with the heads of the company's different divisions to find out what they need and expect from their legal practitioners.

Mentoring, both formal and informal, is another way that fledgling

spondents also report that their mentors didn't help them integrate into social networks, gain "substantive" contacts with clients or assist them in landing the assignments required to advance their careers and meet their billable hours.

"In a professional service firm like a law firm, relationships are key to your professional advancement," says Catalyst's Stellings. "Leadership often doesn't understand the nature of informal networks, because they are so personally involved and don't even realize they are in a network."

"Men will promote men, especially if they think men will be more available to work longer hours not having to deal with conflicts between family priorities and work," says Executive Coach Joanna Chaney of Forward Alliance, a personal/professional consulting firm located in Chicago.

Whatever the reason, exclusion from business relationships is a vicious cycle that takes a variety of forms, from the inability to compete

"The legal profession must better reflect the communities we serve if it is to serve better both today's clients and those communities."

—*Michael S. Greco,*
ABA President

must reach and when in order to advance to partner.

Both private law firms and corporate legal departments are ratcheting up their career-development and other retention programs to keep their associates. "We've really revamped our training of lawyers," explains Janine Dascenzo, managing counsel of General Electric's legal organization. "We are teaching and training our lawyers to be business

lawyers are being helped to learn to cultivate clients. At one small New York law firm, senior female lawyers who have already raised children and advanced to the top ranks are reaching back to mentor associates. Women of color, in particular, struggle with the lack of mentors. Sixty-seven percent of the women of color attorneys recently surveyed by the ABA cited the need for more or better mentoring. These same re-

Schoeman, Updike & Kaufman's Culture Advances Female Lawyers

The women-owned law firm of Schoeman, Updike & Kaufman, LLP represents some of the country's largest and most prestigious corporations. It is a firm where both male and female lawyers can work comfortably and advance their careers.

"It is embedded in the fabric of our firm," explains Beth Kaufman, partner and owner who joined the firm in 1978 as its first female associate. "Even before we became a women-owned firm, the women here never felt that we were anything but full colleagues of our male partners."

Although the firm, founded in 1969, originally had four male partners, currently more than half (56 percent) of its partners are female, compared to the profession's average of 17 percent. Charlie Updike, one of the original four, noted that "we just hired the best lawyers we could find, and they happened to be women."

Kaufman and Mindy Stern, two senior partners, agree that the firm's size and equal-opportunity culture helped them to grow in ways they could not have at other firms. "We all matured as lawyers here, working on interesting



Beth Kaufman



Mindy Stern

and complex matters, for sophisticated and loyal clients," says Stern. "We were encouraged to be innovative and entrepreneurial. In that way, the women in the firm were empowered to succeed."

Flexibility is a hallmark of the law firm. "So long as the client's needs are well served and the work product meets our standard of excellence, we do not care when the work is done or where it is done,"

explains Kaufman, the mother of three (now adult) women.

Partners and associates agree that having a critical mass of women lawyers and role models who carry serious responsibility for the firm's welfare and day-to-day operations has created a natural environment for mentoring. The women in the firm have monthly lunch meetings to discuss the matters on which they are working, their clients' goals, practice development and work/life balance issues. The younger women in the firm have understanding role models with whom to discuss professional choices, how to solve everyday problems in the most practical way and how to best manage their complex careers and lives.