



Sponsoring Diverse Attorneys
February 14, 2012

Despite great progress in diversity at law firms in California, a large gap still exists for women and minorities at the most senior levels. Sponsorship has been identified by as a best practice tool for the advancement of diverse attorneys in particular who many not otherwise have equal access to advancement opportunities. A sponsor is defined as someone who is in a position to resource relevant advancement opportunities (e.g. work opportunities, pitch participation, speaking opportunities, committee membership, etc.). Below is a summary of three relevant and succinct research reports which detail the opportunity gaps experienced by diverse attorneys, the importance of sponsorship and effective sponsorship strategies.

Women and Minority Partners in Big Law

Rene Ciria-Cruz, *The California Lawyer*, November 2011

<http://www.callawyer.com/clstory.cfm?pubdt=NaN&eid=918764&evid=1>

According to the 2011 California 50 survey, California law firms performed slightly better than the rest of the country in promoting and advancing minority and female partners. Whereas the recent National Association for Law Placement (NALP) survey reported that 19 percent of partners were women and 6 percent of partners were minorities in the largest U.S. law firms, 21 percent of partners were women and 12 percent were minorities in California's fifty biggest law firms.

Women in Law in the U.S.

Catalyst, January 9, 2012

<http://www.catalyst.org/publication/246/women-in-law-in-the-us>

Catalyst's recent study of women in law details that in 2011, women made up 45.4% of associates yet only 19.5% of partners in U.S. law firms. Out of the largest firms in the U.S., 11% had no women sitting on its governing committees. Women are still outnumbered by men in many law firm positions — women make up 44% of seventh year associates; 34% of counsel; 25% of non-equity partners, and 15% of equity partners. The succinct report also provides statistics on a variety of areas in which gender gaps still exist such as firm leadership positions, business development credit, compensation, and child rearing support. The report further outlines that women of color were more likely than white women to experience dissatisfaction with current levels of work relative to work experience, access to high-profile client assignments, access to constructive feedback for development purposes and commitment from senior leadership for promotion to partnership – with a resulting lower likelihood to aspire to partnership.

Sponsoring Women to Success

Heather Foust-Cummings, Sarah Dinolfo, Jennifer Kohler, Catalyst, August 2011

http://www.catalyst.org/file/497/sponsoring_women_to_success.pdf

Based on the findings from 93 interviews of both the sponsors and protégés, the report clarified the concept of sponsorship within an organization and how it is especially important for women to help them advance to the top level. Unlike traditional mentoring, sponsors often provided more actionable and targeted coaching specific to prepare protégés for the complexities of new roles or assignments, and advice on how to make broader and more strategic contributions to the organization. Sponsors also often helped protégés to develop skills that are necessary for advancement and gain visibility within the firm. As protégés advance to more senior levels, sponsors also play an important role in serving as advocates for protégés. For female high-performers in particular, the report discussed how sponsorship can help women to overcome the barriers they face in career advancement. The four critical features of a sponsorship relationship based on the study were trust, honesty, communication and commitment. Sponsors can also benefit from the sponsorship relation by gaining information that leads to career growth as well as personal and professional satisfaction. In order to foster sponsorship, the organization must also ensure explicit and transparent expectations for senior leaders to act as sponsors.