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Subject: Much Ado About Diversity - A Special Edition from The Stromeier Group

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Special Edition - Diversity News from The Stromeier Group

Welcome to our 1st Special Edition Newsletter!

October 1, 2007 Why is this edition special? In this issue, we are sharing insights from diverse and multicultural attorneys about their experiences and law firm's diversity initiatives. The four attorney interviews featured here give an unprecedented look at diversity initiatives from a minority attorney perspective. All attorneys self-identified their cultural heritage but asked to remain anonymous which is why we only reveal their profile and practice area. We hope you will find these interviews thought-provoking and insightful.

Kindly,
Britta Stromeier, Principal

Much Ado About Diversity

John, Male, Black-American (Multiracial), Litigation Associate at 1300 attorney law firm in CA.

Why did you become a lawyer? "Because I thought that a law degree would help me be able to work on social issues and affect change for a demographic that lacked access to political power and influence."

How do you think your cultural/ethnic background influences how the firm/partnership views you and/or assigns work to you? "As a minority, I find that I often become the sole voice of a particular race or demographic. For instance, in my nascent career, I have already attended several meetings in which I was the only person of color in the room. In those meetings, I was not necessarily representing "my" race per se, but instead, felt that I was the spokesperson for all minorities in general. Recognizing this fact, confronting particular issues regarding a dual-consciousness, yet staying focused on the needs of my client, while attempting to illustrate that I am more than competent to my peers, can be somewhat overwhelming at times. In regards to work flow, regardless of your previous achievements (academic accolades, published articles, law school rankings, clerkships, etc.), as a minority, I think the typical big firm default presumes that your work product is not as good as your white counterparts'. Thus, you must first disprove the default before any real, substantial work is provided to you."

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There has been much discussion and analysis about diversity and law firms. In your opinion, what works and what is it that law firms are "not getting right" when addressing their diversity and inclusion initiatives? "In my experience most firms don't "get it" because they are attempting to implement a diversity initiative without first articulating what "success" means. It is virtually impossible to create a successful program without first defining the goals of the program. For instance, most firms focus on numbers. 'If we can get 5 black, 8 women, 6 Asian, 3 openly GLBT, and 4 Hispanic associates to our firm in the next 3 years, we are successful.' With this as the primary goal, a typical firm will go out and heavily recruit minority candidates from the various law schools across the country. Some firms are able to achieve this initial goal and are quick to tout their success. However, these same firms are baffled as to why they are unable to retain these same minority recruits several years later and seem quick to move on to another, ill-thought out diversity initiative in response.

Meanwhile, other firms, seek minority candidates for no other reason than to appease corporate clients, hoping that doing so will bring in more business. During an on-campus interview, a partner told me that she was not interested in diversity issues at all but that her firm was interested in candidates like me because the firm wanted to attain the work of particular clients that informed the firm that it needed to diversify. As you can imagine, though impressed by her candor, having her tell me that her firm was merely interested in me as a puppet was beyond offensive.

The primary issue is that most firms are not genuine in their need or desire to "diversify." Instead, firms' initiatives are often market driven. Thus, diversity committees receive support from their respective firms, not to create inclusion initiatives in a genuine effort to change the legal landscape, but instead to appease corporate clients in an effort to seek greater profits. With this mentality, minorities are sought out, not as humans who are talented, but more as numbers, statistics, and pie charts. I can't tell you how many times my friends and I have been invited to dinners with corporate clients for deals with which we have no connection. Why is it that I have never heard of the deal, yet get invited to dinner with the client? Yet, I have no contact with the client on the deals with which I am working?"

Why do you think diversity and inclusion efforts beyond the representation issue are important? "I fundamentally believe in the notion of strength in numbers. I believe that ideas and work product are enhanced with the input and advice of various talented, and

A Fresh Perspective

We bring a fresh, diverse perspective to your business. Our strength is to develop creative sourcing strategies to increase your firm's reputation and visibility, streamlining of recruiting and human resources systems, and increasing opportunities for diverse talent.

About Us

It is our mission to build trusted relationships with our clients providing efficient and excellent service. We seek to inspire cultural diversity to enhance opportunities for women, people of color, LGBT, people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, and persons with disabilities. We are committed to delivering results that exceed expectations.



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bright people. Clients benefit from having their attorneys look at their legal problems from various perspectives and angles. Thus, having attorneys who have differences of opinion and approach particular legal problems in fundamentally different ways only enhances the process and benefits the client. If all of the attorneys graduated from the same law school and share the same legal philosophies, are from the same region of the country, share the same experiences, are of the same gender, nationality, or race, their work product may suffer from the consequences of "group think" and be limited in scope and analysis. Fortunately, there are many, many lawyers already in the profession and graduating from law school each year. Unfortunately however, the streamline into many of the prestigious law firms is a restricted circuit. Not only will current clients benefit from successful diversity efforts, new clients will also benefit because with genuine inclusion initiative efforts, the shift of power and access will provide legal services to people, communities, and businesses who have not traditionally benefited from these type of services."

Diversity Beyond Representation

Reese, Female, Filipino-American, Corporate Associate at 800 attorney law firm in CA.

Why did you decide to become a lawyer? "I enjoy the mental processes that the law requires and saw it as a tool to achieve business objectives and social justice."

How do you think your cultural/ethnic background influences how the firm/partnership views you and/or assigns work to you? "I haven't experienced any difference in treatment that stemmed from my non-Caucasian background. I think that my firm specifically wants to hire those of non-Caucasian backgrounds because it believes that this makes it a "diverse" firm. However, I don't believe that the firm will "lower it's standards" or has any kind of "affirmative action" program; rather, given two equally qualified candidates, it will pick the non-Caucasian candidate. However, everyone who comes in who is of different ethnic backgrounds tends to come from the same socio-economic background."

Why do you think diversity and inclusion efforts beyond the representation issue are important? "Diversity is about more than representation because it affects a firm's culture and shared values. It affects individual approaches to employee interactions and client interactions, and may be valued or denied through communication. It affects the things that motivate attorneys and the types of clients they seek and support. Diversity affects all aspects of the broad vision and the day-to-day interactions between people, whether or not it is acknowledged."

In your opinion what constitutes a great lawyer?

"I believe that a great lawyer is one who has a strong ethical code but knows where arguments regarding the gray areas of the law can ethically be made. She works for the betterment of the client and community, and if the two are in conflict, advises the client about ways to achieve goals while refraining from harming the community. A great lawyer understands the legal minutiae, but uses that understanding to work for the overall goal or business objective of a client. She dedicates her life both inside and out of the office to making the world a better place - whether through direct service or outstanding ethics or structuring a transaction fairly and ethically."

The Issue of Mentorship

Randi, Female, Corporate Attorney of East Indian decent at 700 attorney law firm in Washington DC.

There has been much discussion and analysis about diversity and law firms. In your opinion, what works and what is it that law firms are "not getting right" when addressing their diversity and inclusion initiatives?

"Firms should actively seek to hire diverse attorneys at the associate and partner levels for longer retention of diverse associates. Mentorship and the feeling that there are advocates to lobby for good work on your behalf when it does not organically come ones way helps to retain diverse attorneys at a firm during challenging times. It behooves firms to cultivate talented people from all backgrounds as a business matter as well."

Linda, Female, Transactional Attorney of Asian decent at 800 attorney law firm in CA.

There has been much discussion and analysis about diversity and law firms. In your opinion, what works and what is it that law firms are "not getting right" when addressing their diversity and inclusion initiatives?

"Having mentorship programs specifically geared for minority attorneys and regular discussions and meetings."

Why do you think diversity and inclusion efforts beyond representation are important? "For other Asians to feel like partnership is attainable to them. If the firm does Asia-Pacific work, the ability to leverage their associates that are from this culture or speak that language creates rapport and induces trust with clients."

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