

LAW FIRM RECRUITING

Recruiting diverse attorneys

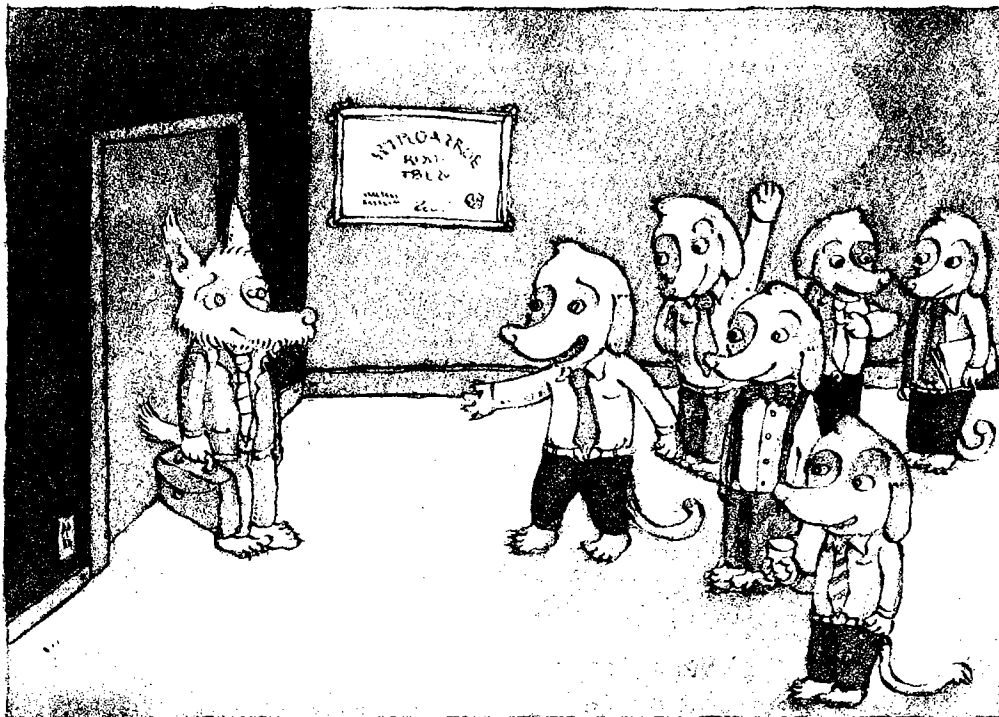
Some firms are partnering with law school programs and hiring full-time diversity professionals.

By Patrick Lynch and Elaine Arabatzis
SPECIAL TO THE NATIONAL LAW JOURNAL

IN 1992, A GROUP of law firms in Washington signed on to "The D.C. Conference of Opportunities for Minorities in the Legal Profession" to demonstrate their commitment to improving diversity at their firms. The conference was spearheaded by Vernon Jordan, and was a project of the District of Columbia Bar. In New York, firms participated in a similar challenge, led by the Association of the Bar of the City of New York. The initial goal, as outlined in these citywide initiatives, was to populate firms with 10% minority attorneys in five years' time.

At that time, there were only a few options for recruiting diverse attorneys. Some firms recruited at predominantly black law schools. The Black Law Students

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Association and the Hispanic law student group, La Alianza, held job fairs, but these groups were essentially the only organizations offering opportunities for employers to hire law students of color.

Today, firms are still struggling to meet and surpass the original goal of a population of 10% diverse attorneys. Some firms have made great strides, while others have not been able to succeed as much as they would have liked. However, many more firms today understand that diversity is key for talent, business and quality of life reasons. As a result, many current diversity ini-

tiatives also focus on the retention of minority attorneys, as well as their recruitment.

What are firms doing to recruit and retain diverse attorneys and law students today?

Firms with a strong cadre of diverse senior attorneys are able to provide role models for junior attorneys and thereby help with retention. Diverse law students and associates are attracted to firms with substantial numbers of diverse partners, so increasing the diverse partnership ranks is very important for recruiting and retention.

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Creativity can play a role in recruiting IP attorneys

One method is to hire scientists and engineers as specialists and then to help pay for law school.

By Racquel Keller
SPECIAL TO THE NATIONAL LAW JOURNAL

IN THE BOOK *Thriving on Chaos, Handbook for a Management Revolution*, Tom Peters states: "If it ain't broken, you just haven't looked hard enough." It is integral to the success of a firm's recruitment and retention of

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qualified candidates that it continually assess current market trends as well as policies and procedures. This attitude spawns creativity, a drive and curiosity that fosters creation rather than imitation. The one thing that is certain is that change is continual. One can either fall victim to it or be its catalyst.

In the latter part of the 1990s, intellectual property law experienced something akin to a gold rush. Firms that had carved out a gilded niche suddenly found themselves awash in general practice prospectors. A landscape that had once been wild and open became densely populated within a span of a few short years. As a result of the sudden growth in early 1999, the District of Columbia alone experienced a nearly 200% increase in IP law practices in little more than two years.

Intellectual property law developed from the backwater region of the law it was in the 1970s into the

prime piece of real estate it is today. In the pursuit of the most qualified candidates, intellectual property law firms now compete with countless others including general practice firms, other IP law firms and corporations.

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Pro bono has become more of an imperative in attracting lawyers. R2
Firms must be nimble in reacting to changing circumstances. R2

If you think you can't spare the time to hire a new attorney, we've got you covered.

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Firms are acting to improve diverse student hiring

'DIVERSITY' FROM PAGE R1

In the recruiting of lateral partners, personal relationships of attorneys already within the firm are very helpful, as well as endorsements from other individuals in the legal market, such as in-house counsel. Today, many private companies are making a commitment to diversity and are therefore mandating that their service providers also support diverse workplaces. It is a huge asset for a law firm if their clients will endorse the firm's diversity efforts and thereby assist in the firm's recruiting efforts.

Many firms are working more closely with law schools to enhance the placement of diverse law students into their summer associate programs. Summer associate programs provide second-year law students with an opportunity to work at a law firm over the summer, where they receive the type of assignments typically given to first-year associates. These programs are typically the most important pipeline for law firm hiring.

A number of initiatives

The following are examples of initiatives firms have taken to improve their diverse law student hiring programs:

- Hiring diverse first-year law students to participate in summer programs. Typically law firms hire second-year law students for their summer associate classes. By offering diverse first-year law students a summer job, firms hope to reach out to students they might not be able to recruit during the highly competitive second-year law stu-

dent recruiting process. In addition, these students can be great ambassadors for the firm when they return to their law schools during the next academic year.

- Sponsoring programs for diverse law student organizations. Firms provide attorneys as speakers, mentors and coaches for moot court competitions sponsored by diverse law student groups. Firms also help to defray the cost of student-run job fairs and networking events.

- Participating in diverse student networking events, coordinated by various law schools. One such event is the University of Maryland's "Firm Night."

Many participate in networking events at law schools.

These events provide an opportunity for students to visit law firms, talk with attorneys about what their day-to-day work actually entails and learn about what life would be like should they choose to work in private practice.

- Supplying speakers for panels on topics such as the Americans With Disabilities Act, which are held as a part of the orientation for new law students.

- Participating in mentoring and speaker programs of law schools' women's organizations.

- Offering opportunities to diverse

law students to work part-time during the academic year as law clerks or interns at law firms.

- Providing interviewers for mock interview programs, sponsored by diverse law student groups, or the law school itself, in conjunction with other mock interview programs.

- Offering fellowships to diverse law students. Some programs require proof of financial need and some fellowships are based on writing competitions. Morgan, Lewis & Bockius offers a book scholarship program. Dickstein Shapiro Morin & Oshinsky supports the Scholarship Committee of the American Intellectual Property Law Education Foundation, which provides scholarships for talented minority law students who are interested in intellectual property law.

- Working closely with law schools to help recruit diverse law students, through sponsorship of events for newly admitted students and the like. The University of Miami School of Law sponsors the "Professional Opportunity Program," which provides a vehicle for firms to hire diverse law students as summer associates and academic-year clerks.

Today, there are many professional development organizations with a focus on promoting diversity in the legal profession, both on a national and citywide basis. For example, the Washington Area Legal Recruitment Administrators Association featured a diversity networking event on March 29. This event was open to all diverse law students from Washington-area law schools. Attorneys from

sponsoring firms attended the program to meet the law students through a "round robin" event, where they had eight minutes to network before moving on to the next table.

Another Washington institution is the D.C. Road Show. Founded by African-American attorneys in the early 1990s, the D.C. Road Show provides a vehicle for African-American attorneys from Washington law firms to speak on panels at a variety of law schools all over the country. Panel topics include what life as a diverse attorney is like at a large law firm, interviewing techniques and opportunities for networking with diverse attorneys from the Washington area. The group also sponsors a reception each summer for African-American summer associates.

The Corporate Law Division of the Sponsors for Educational Opportunity program in New York matches recent college graduates who have been accepted to law school with law firms. The students work at the law firms during the summer before they start law school.

Finally, the Minority Corporate Counsel Association (MCCA) offers a number of opportunities for law firms to sponsor events and partner with corporate counsel to provide opportunities for law firm attorneys to meet diverse attorneys from corporations and law students. Through their new Corporate Scholars Program, the MCCA will offer scholarships to diverse first-year law students.

In-house professionals

The latest trend at law firms is to create an internal position to provide management direction and a full-time focus on developing diversity initiatives. Firms hope that by creating a culture that embraces and supports diversity from a leadership level, they will be able to attract and retain a more diverse work force.

A few examples of these roles include Edwin Bowman, formerly vice president, manager of diversity development for Merrill Lynch, and now diversity manager for Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom; and Jacqueline Wilson Cranford, previously the firmwide director of recruitment and development at O'Melveny & Myers, and now its director of diversity.

In addition, many law firms are working with diversity consultants to promote and foster diversity at all levels of the firm. Firms vary on how they utilize these consultants. Some firms engage consultants to sensitize their entire staffs on diversity issues in order to make their workplaces more welcoming to diverse populations. Others use consultants to gauge where they are in terms of diversity, where they need to be and how they can get there. Some firms are focused on training their attorneys on diversity issues. One of the more innovative consultants, Arin Reeves, trains attorneys and staff, who in turn train others at the firms to facilitate interaction through "diversity dialogues." These dialogues provide a forum for small groups of staff and attorneys to meet to discuss their differences and to learn about one another. Led by the trained attorneys and staff, the key issues raised in these dialogues can then be used to help shape a firm's diversity programming.

There are many ways that law firms are working to increase diversity in their ranks through strategic recruiting initiatives. These firms understand that recruiting is a key step to creating diverse workplaces, where both employees and clients benefit from a collaboration of different ideas and diverse backgrounds. ■

Pro bono can help in retention, too

'PRO BONO' FROM PAGE R2

The reasons underlying many law students' and attorneys' interest in doing pro bono work are often as varied as the nature of the work that interests them.

Some are driven by a personal, moral or religious commitment to help those in need. Some are so eager to develop legal skills in their chosen area of practice that they would rather not wait until a billable opportunity presents itself. (It is no secret that even the most talented new associates may not have the immediate opportunity to gain experience in court or at deposition, or to have primary responsibility for client communications.) Still others find that maintaining a diverse work schedule that includes pro bono matters is essential to an interesting and dynamic career.

Many of the accomplishments of which attorneys are most proud are victories achieved on behalf of pro bono clients. (And, often, these victories make for some of the most interesting war stories that we share with our friends and families.) And ultimately, of course, a happy and fulfilled attorney is a lot less likely to make a lateral move.

Law firms, often through the pro bono work that they do, have been responsible for some of the most significant, far-reaching reforms within the American legal system. Many firms rightly wear as a badge of honor their contributions to the improvement of society, the legal system and the legal profession. The current recruiting climate means that this badge of honor serves as a welcome sign attracting the best and the brightest new attorneys to a firm's associate ranks.

Many law students, whether or not they are interested in a lifetime career in

private practice, will opt to begin their careers in a law firm setting. The cost of law school (and the attendant loan burden), together with the invaluable training that firms offer to young lawyers, make starting one's career at a law firm a clear choice for many law students.

Of the new recruits who begin work at a firm after they take the bar exam, it is thought to be inevitable that some of the best and the brightest will leave after only a few years. This, of course, is quite costly to firms. While there are many reasons why new attorneys elect to leave a firm, some of the most capable and promising who leave do so because they are not satisfied with the level of responsibility they have or have not achieved. Others find that, for the junior associate, the nature of the work can be a "grind"—due diligence reviews, massive document productions and the like.

More responsibility

Meaningful pro bono work can make a significant difference. Such work introduces into the mix not just new, different and, perhaps, more interesting subject matter to the associate, but it also provides the opportunity for associates to develop a broader skill set that will enable them more rapidly and skillfully to assume greater responsibility in their billable matters. For example, pro bono matters can offer new associates opportunities to handle negotiations, interview clients and witnesses, conclude agreements, take depositions, argue motions, try cases, form companies and more.

Two other reasons that make pro bono an imperative for today's law firms are the following. First, firms devote tremendous resources to recruiting top

law students with diverse skills and perspectives. One important step that can serve the firm is to listen to the interests of the associates. Pro bono administrators can do this by simply asking all associates to identify the types of issues or matters on which they seek pro bono opportunities, and then finding and bringing in that work for the associates.

But second, a dynamic pro bono program can serve to both maintain and increase diversity. Matching diverse associates with the pro bono work of their choosing is one important element to accomplishing this goal. Using this approach, diverse associates work on pro bono issues and matters that they find significant (which leads to greater job satisfaction) and, concurrently, the firm's pro bono projects develop into a reflection of the values and interests of the attorneys who make up the firm.

This, too, can only help stem attrition rates and increase the likelihood that those who seek out and accept offers to join the firm's associate ranks will find the firm to be a place where they are gratified and fulfilled by their work, their colleagues and the general firm culture.

Every firm wishes to have its most highly qualified associates want to make a permanent home for themselves at the firm. But that requires that those involved in recruiting not only understand the importance of pro bono to new associates, but appreciate its tremendous training and retention value as well. A firm culture should value pro bono for its own sake, of course. Even for such a firm, though, the benefits that an effective and dynamic pro bono program can offer to its recruiting, training and retention efforts cannot be overstated. ■