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LAW FIRM RECRUITING

PUT A PREMIUM ON

Equal Opportunity

The practice of law has responsibly endeavored to protect the right to equal opportunity. The business of law, just like other industries, has benefited from these efforts, with the rewards that accompany an increasingly diverse workplace.

Diversity is now an integral part of doing the business of law—especially in today's global economy—and a commitment to diversity enables a law firm to draw from a remarkable wealth of talent in order to retain the very best in the legal profession.

Putting a premium on equal opportunity is paramount to a firm's ability to recruit and retain the best attorneys. Top recruits of all races, national origins and sexual orientations, men and women, are attracted to a law firm that hires from a diverse pool of candidates and provides an environment of real teamwork and

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A rich and innovative mix of outreach encourages diversity—and the place to start is with your own attorneys and staff.

BY SHARON BOWEN

equal opportunity.

Law firms must become leaders at conceiving and implementing methods to ensure that lawyers are hired, trained and promoted fairly and with attention to equal opportunity and diversity in the practice of law. No one solution will get the job done.

What we have found helpful in recruiting a diverse group of attorneys is a rich and innovative mix of outreach to attract and retain the best people across the world. Some forms of outreach may

involve firm-wide initiatives and others will be tailored very specifically to a targeted location.

And the place to start is reaching out to your attorneys and staff.

Internal Committees Can Guide Initiatives

First and foremost, a law firm needs to reach out internally and include representatives from the whole firm in planning and implementing its diversity initiatives. It is important for the committee to have a wide range of representation from the firm's other committees, including the executive or management committees, the recruiting/hiring committee, any associates committees, etc.

A committee should be active in coordinating targeted and sustained efforts at minority recruitment, hiring and advancement. For example, to this end, Latham established a Diversity Committee that is chaired by our vice-chairman and chief operating partner. As an integral part of our Global Recruiting Committee, Latham also has an active Diversity Hiring

Sub-Committee, consisting of attorneys and professional staff devoted to minority outreach efforts.

Networking Aids Recruiting

One of the ways to draw diverse candidates to your firm is to make those candidates feel more comfortable with the people at the firm during the recruitment process.

And one way to accomplish this is to bring your diverse attorneys together in one setting to get to know law student recruits, and let the recruits get to know the people in the firm.

One of the most popular additions to our diversity outreach initiatives has been our annual Diversity Weekend. Arising from associate suggestions during a brainstorming session about diversity issues, each fall we invite self-identified racial and ethnic minorities and law students who are openly gay to come together with Latham attorneys and firm leaders for three days of substantive discussion and social events.

One Diversity Weekend participant, a law student who summered in our New York office and who will be starting as a full-time associate in the fall of 2006, commented: "With many talented minority candidates shying away from 'big firms,' it seems that Latham has stumbled upon a very successful recruiting model: Let candidates get to know the firm and get to know each other."

Create Scholarship Opportunities

Support should extend beyond the firm to diverse law students who are setting an example for the profession.

Offering scholarships to students who demonstrate the ability to contribute to the diversity objectives of global law firms, who have succeeded in overcoming obstacles or challenges in deciding to choose law as a profession, or who exhibit academic or leadership achievements, is an effective way to encourage diversity with the corporate legal community.

In 2005, we launched the Latham Diversity Scholars Program that is designed to increase the number of

diverse law students studying at ABA-accredited law schools who wish to pursue a career with a global law firm and intend to practice law in the U.S. The firm will name four Latham Diversity Scholars in the spring of 2006 and all recipients will receive a \$10,000 non-renewable scholarship for their third year of law school (2006-07). In our inaugural year, we received 315 applications from diverse second-year law students.

Listen to Your Own People

Firms must be responsive to attorney and staff concerns about diversity. Firms should also make it easy for diverse candidates to share their ideas and concerns about how to improve the recruitment and retention of diverse attorneys.

Using another example from Latham, when a group of our associates suggested that the firm support both formal and informal get-togethers among self-identifying racial and ethnic minority and openly gay attorneys, we created a series of "affinity dinners"—gatherings where they can together discuss issues regarding diversity. Many partners, associates and summer associates have now participated in a series, which are also supplemented by informal lunches.

The aim of these types of meetings should not be to throw money blindly towards diversity efforts. Rather, the goal should be to provide an outlet for diverse attorneys to meet, voice concerns and advance diversity.

The message from our attorneys and summer associates has been loud and clear: It's about action, not paper tiger statements simply touting the importance of diversity. It is imperative to have structures in place for attorneys and staff to make suggestions to improve diversity at the firm.

Mentoring Is Always Key

One way to retain associates is to support the formal and informal firm relationships among partners, associates and staff.

In particular, as our firm has grown, we have tried to be sensitive to the

importance of preserving full opportunities for our associates to form mentoring relationships with senior attorneys. Successful mentoring programs should provide guidelines and structure to facilitate associates' integration into the firm and to assist with their professional development.

Our mentoring program uses attorneys' responses to a confidential questionnaire to pair new first-year and lateral associates with senior attorneys who help them understand the inner workings of the firm and the resources and opportunities available to them.

Engage in Professional and Civic Events

Targeted and sustained efforts at minority recruitment and hiring should include sponsorship of and participation in a wide variety of events designed to introduce the firm to minority recruits and vice versa.

Minority job fairs and recruitment programs, academic and social events at law school campuses, partnering opportunities with minority student organizations and advertisements in major publications are all ways to promote a commitment to diversity. On a broader scale, sponsoring Minority Corporate Counsel Association diversity conferences and regional dinners are also valuable outreach tools.

Taking on a pro bono matter that furthers diversity initiatives is also an effective way to demonstrate your firm's true commitment to the ideal of equal opportunity.

Law firms must strive for greatness in recruiting diverse attorneys and staff. And that demands innovation in outreach to attract people whose diversity and quality reflect the best in the profession. •

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