

Diversity and the Role of the Young Lawyer

By Rachel Saloom

When you ask what “diversity” means in the legal profession, you get many different responses. Some lawyers are highly committed to increasing diversity in the legal field, while others are against any type of proactive diversity measures in the workplace. In between, however, there is a very large group of lawyers, including young lawyers, who are apathetic regarding diversity in the legal profession.

Often it seems as though the only people who care about diversity are diverse attorneys. Lawyers who do care become known as the “diversity lawyers” in their workplaces. Diversity discussions often make those in the majority feel either uncomfortable or as though they do not have anything to contribute.

While diversity should definitely matter to diverse attorneys, it should also matter to all attorneys. The legal field is rapidly changing. Clients now demand a diverse set of lawyers to meet their business needs. As corporations become more diverse, especially at the highest levels, they seek out diverse teams of lawyers to represent them. This means moving beyond tokenism in showing that your firm is diverse toward active business planning so that your team of lawyers is more reflective of the clients they represent.

The business case for diversity has been presented many times. Law firms, like any business, often look at the bottom line when considering whether to promote diversity. If it means more business, then diversity is an important business development tool for any law firm. While the business case for diversity is persuasive, there are many other reasons why more diversity is needed in the legal profession. One of the most important reasons is that the current lack of diversity within our firms is unrepresentative of our society and the clients we serve.

Young lawyers can play a pivotal role in shaping the future of their law firms and organizations, no matter their backgrounds. I particularly challenge lawyers in the majority to examine how they can contribute to efforts to increase diversity.

These are just some of the many ways we as young lawyers can help:

- **Participate in recruiting** efforts by interviewing law students and taking part in recruiting receptions and activities, especially those geared toward increasing diversity. Often these receptions and events are co-sponsored by diverse law school student groups.
- **Educate yourself** about your

firm’s diversity initiatives by reading your firm’s diversity and recruiting materials. Understand your firm’s position on the issue and what programs are in place to increase diversity. Be proactive and creative in developing your own ideas for diversity initiatives within your firm.

- **Mentor** diverse law students, summer associates, and more junior attorneys.
- **Volunteer** by coaching a local high school mock trial team, and encourage all students to consider careers in the legal field.
- **Be open minded and creative** in exploring diversity initiatives that would work in your firm. Engage in open dialogue with lawyers of backgrounds different from your own to form innovative ideas and solutions.

Efforts like these will help eliminate the so-called diversity lawyers in firms and create a profession where both the majority and minority attorneys play a role in increasing diversity. Young lawyers have a tremendous opportunity to shape the future of our field, and the time to act is now.

Rachel Saloom is an associate with Paul, Hastings, Janofsky & Walker LLP, in Atlanta. She can be contacted at rachelsaloom@paulhastings.com.



THE YOUNG LAWYERS DIVISION HOSTS FIRST DIVERSITY SUMMIT

By Dana M. Douglas



APRIL 19, 2008 | WASHINGTON, D.C.

The American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division is pleased to be hosting the “Diversity: The Next Generation” Summit in conjunction with the 2008 ABA YLD Spring Conference. This dynamic event promises to provide a very worthwhile and stimulating conversation on diversity in our profession.

The Diversity Summit will gather young lawyers from across the country representing state, local, and specialty bar organizations, as well as law firm, legal department, and minority legal community leaders, to exchange ideas on how young lawyers can ensure that the profession reflects the society it serves and foster an environment of inclusion. In conjunction with the summit, the YLD will be creating an online toolkit and vignette-driven diversity training manual.

Whether or not you can attend the summit, the YLD invites attorneys to contribute by submitting real-life situations or narratives (i.e., vignettes) dealing with diversity issues they have experienced as young lawyers. We also encourage comments on “best practices” to resolve those real-life situations. The vignettes will provide the breeding ground for open discussions during the summit on the challenges the profession faces in creating an environment of inclusion and how we can address those challenges. To submit a real-life situation or narrative, please visit www.abanet.org/yld/spring08/diversitysummit.

The summit will commence with a summary of the state of diversity in the profession, focusing on racial, disability, ethnic, generational, gender, and sexual orientation diversity.

Our purpose in hosting this event is twofold. We hope the individuals who attend and participate in the summit will gain an increased sensitivity and awareness of diversity issues by engaging in thought-provoking discussions on relevant situations. We also hope that participants will use the innovative solutions created through these discussions to make their respective work environments more inclusive. Doing so will help enable all organizations to operate more effectively in a global marketplace.

For more information on the 2008 ABA YLD Spring Conference and the “Diversity: The Next Generation” Summit, visit www.abanet.org/yld/spring08/.

Dana M. Douglas, a partner in the New Orleans law office of Liskow & Lewis, PLC, practices commercial litigation and is a member of the firm’s diversity and recruiting committees. She can be contacted at dmdouglas@liskow.com.