

Attracting and Retaining Diverse Attorneys

THE 2012 WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP STUDY SPOTLIGHTED member expectations and experiences within the legal profession. One of the Study's most important insights is that job satisfaction is the key to lawyer retention. The Study also highlighted the professional experience of diverse attorneys across a myriad of groups. Based on member responses, the Study identified barriers to opportunity, advancement, and social engagement as factors impacting job satisfaction. These factors work together to create conditions that can obstruct or promote career stability.

Racial and ethnic minorities, women and persons with disabilities and impairments were shown to experience barriers at a rate higher than all other diversity groups. In a law firm environment, how can those barriers be effectively addressed to improve job satisfaction and retention?

Job satisfaction is a strong predictor of career stability.

The elements of job satisfaction are:

- A viable, productive and active mentoring relationship with a senior level attorney.
- Spousal or partner support.
- Income.
- Work-life balance.

What can legal employers do to improve job satisfaction and minimize barriers?

1 Create small group and social events to build cross-cultural relationships. Reduce social and opportunity barriers by creating regular, informal opportunities for attorneys to build relationships across departments and practice work groups, and with clients. Remove social barriers by developing events such as family day, spouse and partners dinner, formal "meet and greets," and team building activities. Invite participation and leadership of minority bar leaders to share insights on mentoring and encourage the participation of senior-level attorneys at these events.

2 Develop an equitable work distribution system. Ensure minority attorneys have opportunities to advance by creating a system which de-centralizes how and to whom work is as-

Inclusion requires us to reconsider things such as how work allocation, mentoring and evaluation systems may be biased toward those who are most like the people in decision-making roles.

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signed. Encourage the development of a big-picture approach to assignments focused on the professional development of all attorneys. Develop a process which reviews "best fit" for assignment based on area of specialty and development goals. Formally match first-year associates with senior-level attorneys to conduct quarterly reviews of type and frequency of work assignments. Also consider an assignment process that encourages work-life balance and is not gender based.

3 Establish ongoing training on unconscious bias with the goal of business growth and success. Training on unconscious bias is critical to the success of inclusion efforts. Communicate

a professional commitment to inclusion by providing ongoing, consistent training on unconscious bias and its impact on organizational development. Outline the benefits to business growth, globally competitiveness, and individual sustainability. Understanding that everyone experiences unconscious bias can help remove fear and discomfort with cross-cultural engagement.

RESOURCES

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