

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 161, No. 189

Women's program goes for substance

Bar group assembles institute for in-depth look at being a leader

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This leadership institute doesn't plan to be just a pep rally.

"It's not your garden-variety, everybody-can-be-a-leader, go-team-go type of training," said Andrea S. Kramer, a partner at McDermott, Will & Emery LLP.

Kramer and other leaders of the Women's Bar Association of Illinois are hoping the bar group's new program will give participants practical skills to navigate day-to-day life in their legal careers and help them strengthen their professional networks.

The WBAI Leadership Institute is comprised of six monthly evening sessions starting Oct. 13 and ending March 14. Each meeting will run from 5 to 8:30 p.m. at various locations in the Loop. The meetings start with a networking dinner followed by a workshop.

Unlike a large conference or one-time seminar, Kramer — one of the institute's co-chairs who helped develop the program — said the group will limit the number of participants to keep the sessions small enough for a more interactive environment.

The applications will also give WBAI leaders a sense of the participants and their career objectives, Kramer said. The more confined group will also

help them shape the direction of the sessions, she said.

Overcoming gender stereotypes and biases is the theme for one of the sessions. Kramer said that everyone brings their own biases to the office and acknowledging where those biases exist is the first step to figuring out how to move past those barriers.

One such bias targets women who have children. In some cases, people think women with children are less committed to their careers because the children have to come first, while others think that a career-focused woman must be a bad mother.

"The reality is that women buy into the stereotypes the same as men," Kramer said.

There are also internal and personal attitudes that women have about their careers, Kramer said. Developing grit and a positive mindset is the topic of another session.

Rather than just telling women to "speak louder," Kramer said, there is a way to develop internal attitudes that can help women stay focused and bounce back from situations when events aren't going their way.

Partially because of societal stereotypes and biases, Kramer said there's a self-confidence gap that some women experience in the workplace.

"We don't raise our hands for a project if we're not 100 percent sure if we can do it," she said. "A man will raise his hand if he is 60 to 70 percent sure."

Sharon R. Nowakowski, another program co-chair and associate at Polsinelli P.C., said there will also be a session on



Sharon R. Nowakowski

"rainmaking" — luring in business — and one on generational and gender communication issues in the workplace. The community involvement session will discuss developing leadership skills through volunteering on nonprofit and corporate boards as well as legal career alternatives.

If there is still space after the registration period ends, WBAI may offer tickets for individual sessions. Continuing Legal Education credit may be offered for some sessions.

Nowakowski said one of the strengths of this institute is the continuity it provides between sessions and its attempts to tailor the program to participants' career goals.

The majority of the speakers are local attorneys, she said, so participants can engage with the speakers and get to know them throughout the six months of the institute.

"All women have this ability to



Andrea S. Kramer

have empowering lives," Nowakowski said. "I think this is a way to provide these tools to bring this out and help make a difference."

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The Women's Bar Association of Illinois is currently accepting applications for its Leadership Institute with a soft deadline of Thursday and will continue to take applications on a rolling basis until the initial session on Oct. 13. The cost for six sessions and workshop materials is \$199 for WBAI members or members of the Coalition of Women's Initiatives in Law, Illinois State Bar Association Women and the Law Committee and other partnering organizations. The cost is \$299 for all other participants. Tickets for individual sessions may be available, space allowing, for \$60. Continuing Legal Education credit may be offered for some sessions.

For an application and more information, visit wbaillinois.org or call (312) 341-8530.