



In this Issue

[From the Chair](#)

[From the Editor](#)

[The Widespread Impact of The FCCs 2014 Ruling
Relating to Fax Advertising](#)

[Diversity Committee: Voices From the Trenches:
Managing Your Legal Career As a New Diverse
Attorney](#)

[What About the Statute of Frauds \(?\). Said the
"Uniform Electronic Transactions Act" \(UETA\)
Class Action SLG Publications Subcommittee](#)

[Seminar Update](#)

[First Circuit Update](#)

[Second Circuit Update](#)

Diversity Committee: Voices From the Trenches: Managing Your Legal Career As a New Diverse Attorney

by Dan Crashaw and Nacente Seabury



With the demise of the lock-step promotion system, law firms have shifted to a merit-based system that separates the professionally strong from the weak. In the aftermath of the Great Recession, some of the nation's largest firms finally realized that their models for associate development represented a significant

risk in need of better management. Incorporated into this updated model is shared responsibility: an associate now must prove to a firm why it should continue to invest in her career. For diverse attorneys, institutional barriers and biases at all levels continue to impact professional growth and to keep attrition rates high. This does not mean that the current merit-based system is necessarily hurting diverse attorneys. Rather, this structure makes it more important than ever for diverse attorneys to affirmatively define themselves and their work product to ensure a long and successful legal career.

As the first quarter of 2015 quickly draws to a close, now is the perfect time to take stock of plans set in the last quarter of 2014. It may also be a better time to realign that plan, to refocus your efforts and perhaps even to reboot. Excellent legal work is necessary, but not sufficient for success at any law firm. Planning makes all the difference.

For diverse associates in particular, it is imperative to be as proactive as possible to chart your own course for practice and career success. New attorneys must consider the value of mentors, professional development, and business development in their personal practices. Employing these three components will empower associates to become successful attorneys in their own right and indispensable assets to their firms.

Mentors Matter

Attorneys, especially those at large law firms, must recognize the importance of having a support system within and outside the firm. Mentors within the office help newer attorneys to understand and to navigate firm culture. For diverse attorneys, having a broad network of supporters that can contribute distinct viewpoints will assist a new attorney in a number of ways: serving as a sounding board to help place your frustrations and complaints in context; helping you identify the unwritten rules that govern your firm; managing the isolation that you might feel as one of only a few diverse attorneys in your organization; and significantly, navigating the non-legal aspects of practicing law, including work-life

Practical Law
BEGINNING AT SQUARE ONE IS FINE
UNLESS YOU NEED A PRELIMINARY
INJUNCTION NOW.

Start with Practical Law.

Free trial! [GO >>](#)



Practical Law provides legal know-how that gives lawyers a better starting point, helping you practice more efficiently and improve client service.

[Join a Committee](#)

[Committee Leadership](#)



Committee Chair
Kathleen A. Lang
Dickinson Wright
klang@dickinsonwright.com



Vice Chair
Christopher T. Sheean
Swanson Martin & Bell
csheean@smbtrials.com



Newsletter Editor
Taren N. Stanton
Tydings & Rosenberg
tstanton@tydingslaw.com

[Click to view entire Leadership](#)

Upcoming Seminar



[Beyond the Borders](#)

**June 4-5 2015
Toronto, Ontario, Canada**

balance and stress management. And diverse attorneys should not limit their mentors to other diverse attorneys. Disparate attorneys or other professional colleagues offer different perspectives – and each of these perspectives can be helpful. Mentors should be approached like a board of directors for your life: each member contributes in their own way to your overall success.

Related to this concept of mentors is sponsorship. Sponsors are individuals who know and believe in your abilities and are willing to advocate on your behalf. Sponsors are earned more than they are requested. Because these people generally have the power and influence to make things happen, your professional conduct and the quality of your work product must rise to the level of attracting their attention. And when these sponsors take notice of you, opportunities will follow. According to Sylvia Ann Hewlett, CEO of The Center for Talent Innovation (“CTI”), the way to get noticed by a potential sponsor is: (1) exceed expectations and make your accomplishments known; (2) demonstrate that you can make your (potential) sponsor look good; and (3) bring something special to the table. While sponsors may require all of these elements before they reach out to help, a mentor can help you chart a path to achieving each one of them.

In the business world, studies have clearly shown that those who have established mentoring relationships perform better, see more salary increases and earn more promotions. There is no question that these same benefits will apply to your legal practice.

Professional Development: Without Planning, Failure is Inevitable

When it comes to a professional development plan, Benjamin Franklin said it best - “By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.” No attorney “does” law, he or she *practices* law. And the only way to achieve the excellence demanded by internal and external clients is to plan for it. A professional development plan, done correctly, creates accountability and results. For a new associate, the professional development plan may be as simple as strategy surrounding the annual evaluation and working all year to develop the skills expected of an attorney at your particular level, in a way that can be quantified at the review. A more sophisticated professional development plan should include ongoing professional and technical training, improved work product, a plan for attaining/leading significant projects, networking efforts, and business development goals. Diverse attorneys who define their practice at the beginning of their careers create a path forward and an opportunity to stand out to their peers and potential sponsors. As your career develops your goals will change, and you should periodically update the professional development plan to adapt to your evolving needs. These updates, however, should still include development goals that strive for improvement, refinement, and success. A professional development plan memorializes an attorney’s commitment to, ownership of and personal responsibility for their career.

Marketing is not a Four-Letter Word – and Stop Eating Lunch Alone

Professional development is inextricably linked to business development. In years past, many attorneys were told that if they did good work, business would eventually come their way. These days are long gone. It is impractical to disregard the business component of the law. A law firm, after all, is predicated on generating business and earning revenue. Firms recognize good work, but business intake and development is what will sustain your career long-term. Attorneys should always have business development in mind, regardless of one’s time in practice. Engaging in this process early in their career will allow

DRI Publications



[Writing a Reservation of Rights: A North American Compendium](#)

DRI Social Links



[PDF Version](#)

attorneys to hone and refine both professional and networking skills efficiently. Moreover, business development requires social development and community ties. Business is not found at your desk, and it is rarely found in the firm's own cafeteria – you must look outward. By joining boards, committees, and professional associations, or even just enjoying your favorite hobbies with new people, an attorney expands her reach and develops her brand. Meeting new people and making community connections, in tandem with doing excellent work, will bring in the referrals. As a young attorney, focus on friends in business, colleagues, and new people entering one's life. Brand yourself as a problem solver, and approach people as such. At the same time, be relentless in your quest to understand their companies' DNA and the industries in which they work. Being relatable, presenting yourself as a solution, and a demonstrable commitment to understanding their business will draw potential clients to you and cement those relationships for long-term business success.

Conclusion

Mentoring, professional development, and business development are three components of every successful law practice. As one's legal career continues to develop and evolve, one must keep a clear picture and goal in mind and work toward its achievement. Mentors will help steer a young attorney along the right path and assist her around the roadblocks. Taking ownership of your career and plotting the incremental steps necessary to achieve your ultimate career goals requires commitment and discipline. Diligence in business development will prove your value to the firm at the outset of your career and will secure longevity. Show your merit to the firm from the start, continue to develop in a well-rounded way, and long-term career success will follow.

Dan Cranshaw is a shareholder at Polsinelli, a national law firm headquartered in Kansas City, Missouri. His practice includes defending products liability and warranty claims, commercial litigation, risk management, nationwide class actions and insurance recovery. Dan can be reached at 816.218.1294 or dcranshaw@polsinelli.com.

Nacente Seabury, an associate at Polsinelli, assists clients in meeting their business objectives in matters involving environmental and insurance recovery litigation. Nacente can be reached at 816.570.4739 or nseabury@polsinelli.com.

[Back](#)