



Follow the leader...

An insight into the approach the US law firm Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP takes to law firm diversity. By **Leslie D. Minier** and **Theresa L. Davis**.

This year, the American Bar Association (ABA) issued a follow-up report to its 2006 *Visible Invisibility* study entitled *From Visible Invisibility to Visibly Successful* (see page 16). The report sought to identify strategies for law firms to achieve long-term success in the retention and advancement of women of colour, and to contribute to the sustained success of women of colour in the profession. As part of this study, the ABA gathered information, insights and advice from 28 female law firm partners of colour in order to compile the beginnings of a 'blueprint' for career success.

While the ABA's excellent research has focused exclusively on women attorneys of colour in large law firms, it is also important to understand the views and strategies of other women of colour in the legal and business worlds who have faced issues similar to those confronted by female lawyers of colour in large law firms. Understanding and learning from this broader group of women of colour has been critical to the development of programming for our firm's Leadership Institute for Women of Color.

Since its inception in 2007, the Katten Leadership Institute for Women of Color has proactively addressed the unique issues that women of colour face and the reasons they leave law firm practice. By engaging our female attorneys of colour in a dialogue about these issues, and by providing them with innovative opportunities for professional development, mentoring and support, we hope to provide the tools necessary to ensure the long-term success and satisfaction of women of colour at the firm. A key part of the Leadership Institute's approach has been to learn from the example of women of colour working outside of large law firms, whether in corporations, academic institutions or other organisations, and adapt their strategies to the law firm context.

Achieving visible success for Katten's female lawyers of colour

Katten launched the Leadership Institute for Women of Color with a day of interactive workshops designed to assist female lawyers of colour from all of our

offices in growing their careers to their fullest potential. A number of Chicago's top minority female business and legal executives and academics were recruited to serve as panelists for various workshops discussing networking skills, career choices, internal and external visibility, maintaining personal strength and stamina, building support systems and marketing.

For this inaugural event, the speakers included Melody Hobson, president of Ariel Capital Management LLC, Andrea L. Zopp, senior vice president of human resources at Exelon Corporation, Connie L. Lindsey, executive vice president of The Northern Trust Company, and University of Chicago Graduate School of Business professor Tanya Menon Gandhi. Throughout their careers, these women have experienced and overcome many of the issues and challenges that female lawyers of colour in large law firms currently face. Being able to turn to such an esteemed group of women for support and advice was incredibly valuable to our lawyers.

This event was the beginning of a successful, long-term diversity initiative

that is responsive to the needs of its participants. A major component of our first event was soliciting lawyer input. We wanted to know what our female lawyers thought about developments at the firm that impact them, and what tools and programming they felt they needed to maximise their success at Katten. We received plenty of feedback which we have used to develop subsequent programs.

Since Katten launched the Leadership Institute, we have made available a variety of support, mentoring and professional development programmes to the firm's female lawyers of colour, alongside programmes designed for both male and female minority lawyers. Most recently, we implemented a programme that brought more transparency to the firm's review process and compensation structure. The programme instructed minority associates on what to expect from the process and how they can better contribute to the process in order to enhance their own professional development and progress. Another recent programme provided oral presentation training to lawyers, during which participants were videotaped and provided with feedback to help them build their confidence and improve their oral presentation skills.

Our upcoming events will be smaller, more intimate gatherings, where our female lawyers of colour will be introduced to prominent women of colour in the legal and business communities, such as an upcoming lunch event with Judge Ann Claire Williams of the US Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit. These events will allow Katten women of colour the opportunity for personal discussion of the obstacles and challenges that these inspiring figures have encountered and overcome.

The big picture: Diversity at Katten

Katten's national Diversity Committee guides firm leadership in implementing strategies to increase, enhance and sustain

diversity within the firm and the broader legal community. Committee members include Katten's national managing partner, its chief diversity officer and members of the board of directors and executive committee. The Diversity Committee serves as the primary advisory group to the Committee on Racial and Ethnic Diversity, the Minority Associates Committee, the Women's Leadership Forum and the GLBT Coalition.

With a diversity commitment statement and strategic diversity plan in place, Katten's Diversity Committee and the various committees it oversees have implemented a number of national initiatives for both men and women that support the recruitment, retention and advancement of lawyers from diverse backgrounds. These include the

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establishment of a firm-wide minority lawyer retreat and regular publication of a diversity newsletter, 'Connecting Katten'.

Katten provides mentoring, support and resources for associates of colour with a strong emphasis on their development and advancement. The firm has also made recruiting minority associates a priority. Since 2004, Katten has offered its Minority Scholarship Programme, which awards three \$15,000 scholarships annually to eligible minority law students participating in our summer associate programme.

Katten sponsors a variety of service programmes that support diversity in the broader community and in turn enrich the lives of our lawyers and staff. In particular, our partnerships with local schools and non-profit community-based

organisations in Chicago, New York and Los Angeles help students succeed academically and prepare them for continued success in the future.

Katten has also hosted and sponsored events organised by the Black Women Lawyers' Association of Greater Chicago Inc., the Chicago Committee on Minorities in Large Law Firms and Corporate Counsel Women of Color. These organisations tackle subject matter relating to best practices for ensuring the success and promoting the advancement of women lawyers of colour.

Katten has made great strides in becoming a thought leader on diversity issues in law firms. We are honoured to have been selected by the Chicago Committee on Minorities in Large Law Firms as the organisation's new

home until 2010. Our partnership with the Chicago Committee and similar organisations and our own efforts through programmes like the Katten Leadership Institute for Women of Color are certain to promote the success of minority lawyers at Katten and throughout the legal profession. [WOMENLEGAL](#)

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