

Chicago Committee on Women's Initiatives in Law Firms
Table Notes From March 18, 2008 Meeting

Tables generally discussed how their firms handled woman's issues

Each of the women's initiatives was at different levels of maturity. Most initiatives provided mentoring programs and some substantive programming, though some focused more on professional development than the others.

Some firms use a *decentralized* approach, for example, forming a Women's Enriching Business task force in 2006 with a focus on business development; progression for 5th years and up; and formal programming. The woman focused events invited clients. That same firm handles policy issues and programming for younger associates through another committee, called the Associates Subcommittee.

Another firm has a subcommittee of the firm's women's initiative, run by associates with programming only for associates. Geared at associate retention.

Other firms used a more *centralized* approach. For example, at one firm a formal committee – the Women's Initiative handles every woman related issue, plans business development events, general attorney programming, and deals with retention and professional development.

One firm had an annual retreat of the National Women's Committee and regularly scheduled monthly calls. In that firm, the National Committee makes recommendations to the National Managing Partner and Executive Committee.

One firm has monthly Women's Leadership programming mostly internal, focusing on improving programming, mostly internal, focusing on improving different skills, such as business development or communication, some of these programs were open to men.

Other firms were *less structured*, utilizing a point person for all women's issues.

Ideas shared to raise awareness and improve participation

At monthly women's initiative lunches, certain women attorneys in the firm are highlighted for their significant accomplishments, victories, client development success or other recent achievements, and certain attorneys talk about projects in the works. This allows women to "toot their own horns" and gives more junior attorneys an idea of the types of work available and who to approach about working on certain projects.

Setting regular times for lunches or other events -- e.g., last Thursday of month, every other Wednesday, etc. -- seems to work best.

Send out "save the date" notices and flyers so as to get events on calendars. Consider scheduling as much in advance as possible and then using thematic flyers and notes to announce, invite, remind, etc.

Several of the firms use women attorneys outside of the leadership team to help in planning events, internal and external. This allows more women to get involved and, to the extent more junior women participate, it gives them an opportunity to develop and hone their leadership skills and further discover the inner workings of the firm (how to book a conference room, how to order lunch, how to approach speakers and plan events, finding ways to live within a budget, where to find help, etc.), all the while exposing them to other leaders in the firm.

Institute a formal reporting back requirement. Make those who plan the events accountable for who went, what they liked or didn't like about the event, what they would have done differently, how they came in with respect to budget, etc. This measurement helps to focus programming and it further develops leadership and responsibility.

In discussing the "apathy" that sometimes develops over programming missing the mark, one participant pointed out that every program will not touch every personality or every level of attorney, and encouraged others to think about their programming as targeting women at senior, middle and junior levels, respectively, and not worrying if some programming misses the mark with some groups. We thought this reminder important as it emphasizes the need for women's initiatives to be thoughtful and deliberate about who they are, what they are aiming to do and who they are aiming to reach with each program.

Some firms use annual surveys or focus groups to determine how the programming was received and how it should be fine tuned.

At many firms, associates take responsibility for planning a majority of the women's initiative events. Increases awareness.

One firm asks two senior women attorneys to gather and regularly present opportunities for more junior women to get involved in community or bar events to help them learn to be leaders.

At least one firm has its own women's initiative website.

In discussing commenting and problem events, it was suggested that "you should never waste a lunch (or dinner): So clients should be invited to help fill those tables that firms buy at charity events and every lunch should be an opportunity to meet with a client.

Mentoring ideas

Special recognition to Q&B, named as having the best mentoring program in the city for several years and its associate retention rate has increased by 30% since implementing this program.

Some ideas regarding mentoring were (1) switching mentors once a year; (2) providing a budget for mentor relationships to promote participation and to facilitate mentees asking mentors to lunch; (3) providing mentor "clusters" rather than one-on-one mentors in order to facilitate mentor relationships at all levels.

Women's Mentoring Circles -- Small circles of associates led by two partners. Each circle has different levels of seniority and different practice group representatives. Monthly meetings and

events. Purpose is to be sure that associates have positive role models and an opportunity to raise issues as they may arise. Geared at associate retention.

Most of the programs were opt-in only or the first 2 years at the firm (as a 1st year associate or lateral hire) were mandatory for the mentee but otherwise all opt-in.

Events with mentors/ees were limited so that the time commitment would not be overwhelming. One firm has 3 events per year, all planned by the mentees.

Mentor pairs or groups are given an amount of money to spend each year (i.e., \$400 per year at one firm; less at other firms).

Monthly mentor topic for discussion (i.e., how was your review; do you agree or disagree; how can we make it better next year).

At one firm mentors are given access to mentees' assignments and those of others to monitor mentee's progress and make sure she is getting the right assignments. At another, the assigning partner/department head makes sure that no one uses only one or two of the junior associates for all of his or her work.

One firm has associates making a business plan for themselves to continuously review with their mentors.

Another uses rotating mentors.

Men's Participation

There was quite a bit of discussion regarding whether men should be invited to women's initiative events. Many expressed fear of "backlash" if men are not invited, and the general consensus was to include men where it made sense from a programming perspective. We also discussed whether some women were "turned off" by events that were too women focused (like shopping, image or beauty events), and how men perceived those types of events. The general consensus is that if marketed correctly, they are appealing to many female clients but that they should be mixed with some other more substantial events.

Some discussed how men were involved. For instance, the overview of the firm's alternative work schedule policies was open to both men and women of the firm

How to Make Partner presentation, open to both men and women associates of the firm

Various client development programs, open to both men and women of the firm

New partner presentation, open to both men and women of the firm who have just made partner

One firm has a parenting group that is open to both men and women to discuss family issues

Current issues debated at offices included

1. Whether attorneys could work from home;
2. a review of part-time policies to see if they impact retention; and
3. how to get women involved in more client development events.

The groups shared various ideas for programming

Key take away: look at the assets you have. For example, if your client is Second City, host an event there.

Big Client Event Ideas

1. Event at New Leaf – flower arranging
2. Women and whisky event
3. Goodman theatre event with clients, back stage tour
4. Shoe shopping events, shop, drink, and invite client
5. Wine tasting with several stations; with Alpana Singh
6. Behind the curtain – at Steppenwolf with a tour
7. Second City – disc with actors
8. Event at Soldier Field with CEO who is a woman
9. Cooking programs with famous chefs
10. Educational programs
11. Weekend conferences and/or retreats for women attorneys and their clients.
12. Business conference and spa day (at Spa Space) with dinner following
13. High tea at the Ritz.
14. External Client Events -- Two mentioned were the Baker Bazaar (an annual event that benefits women owned businesses) and the Neal Gerber Eisenberg Women's Business Law Conference (a women-only event held by NGE in 2007 for its women clients and prospects that included a CLE presentation in the morning at the firm with NGE women partners as presenters, a keynote speech over the lunch hour, spa services in the afternoon and dinner in the evening).
15. Women-Only Attorney Event -- Put on as a day-long seminar for all women attorneys of a firm. A cocktail event including women alumni of the firm the evening before the seminar.
16. CLE programs for women general counsel and women of the firm
17. Program for women in financial services open to women clients and prospects
18. Chicago chocolate tours went over well and were inexpensive
19. Women's marketing events geared toward women clients and prospects were well received. One firm does them annually at a shoe store. A lot of pre-event preparation and post-event follow-up is key.
20. Art gallery with wine tasting
21. Civic projects benefiting women and children

More Casual Internal Program Ideas

1. Professional Speakers in house on image and Business Development
2. Local office meetings followed by happy hour.
3. A panel with four women partners who talked about their approach to Business Development
4. Round table discussion on retention issues and alternative work arrangements.
5. "Two for the Road" Program – up to 6 associates join a partner for lunch and talk about Business Development
6. Panels re: balancing life/work (received well at some firms and not at others)
7. All attorney poker night – run by the women of firm
8. Financial Planner to speak.
9. Panels of general counsels to discuss client service and other relevant issues.
10. One firm sends two female partners to a professional development course each year; participants then return and present what they learned to other female attorneys.
11. Host dinner at a woman partner's home for all women attorneys and summer associates. Great social interaction and community building.
12. Internal panels made up of firm attorneys that worked well (and cost next to nothing) included: (a) flexible work scheduling, (b) work life balance, (c) a sense of "how I got here" and "what has changed" from a senior woman attorney, and (d) business development.
13. One firm put on a program with an outside speaker which included presentation of the Myers-Briggs Analysis. Attorneys took the test and the speaker returned talking about individual results and how to use them in succeeding in a law firm. Men were invited ; good turnout and interest. (Speaker was Lisa Abrams at the UofC career services) office (who was fantastic).
14. Internal Panels with high profile speakers (including client General Counsel panels).
15. Distinguished Speaker series -- Hosting lunches with both internal and external speakers (including clients, women partners, female business leaders).
16. Parenting Group -- A group established to address the needs of lawyers who are balancing work with the responsibilities of parenting. The group brings in external speakers. First program was on how to talk to your kids. The value to the firm is attorney retention.
17. One of the firms holds a firmwide women's retreat as an additional day after the firm's annual partner retreat. There are speakers in the morning with breakout discussion sessions after lunch. Then there is a dinner with a raffle and entertainment.
18. Women in Leadership Forum with a panel discussion by 5 powerful women in business who are clients of the firm discussing issues facing women in leadership
19. Stress management program (this one was presented by a representative of the Legal Aid Counsel) open to both men and women of the firm with CLE credit
20. How to win business from a general counsel program open to both men and women of the firm
21. One firm hosts a women general course forum, where the GCs were encouraged to share their pet peeves about outside counsel with the women attorneys.

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