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A Buyer's Market

Recruiting a Diverse Summer Associate Class

BY MARY FARRELL ROBINSON

Law firm leaders are more aware than ever before that recruiting and retaining diverse talent is a highly competitive business. In response to deteriorating economic conditions worldwide, many law firms have scaled back their recruiting budgets and planned to recruit fewer entry-level associates for at least the next two years. Yet it is especially important in a down economy to hire the best, brightest and most diverse summer class. When recruiting dollars are tight, what's the best approach?

Fortunately, it's a buyer's market. Excellent candidates abound, and firms can be more selective in choosing the next incoming class of associates. Thinking creatively is crucial. Here are a few ways to help ensure you are making smart decisions to maximize your diversity recruiting efforts.

THINK INNOVATIVELY

Think outside the box when it comes to diversity. Consider joining with other local law firms and companies with common diversity-related goals. For example, Duane Morris LLP is part of the Philadelphia Diversity Law Group Inc. (PDLG), a consortium of law firms and corporations committed to increasing ethnic and racial diversity in Philadelphia's larger law firms. Duane Morris' Chief Diversity Officer, Nolan Atkinson Jr., is the co-founder of PDLG. Under his leadership, PDLG grew from 12 members to more than 30, resulting in, among other achievements, opportunities for 25 first-year diverse law students to gain summer internships with leading law firms and companies in the Philadelphia area. The program continues to thrive and is a wonderful recruiting tool for the firm.

START NOW

Remember: Recruiting is a yearlong effort. Generally, the seasonal push for summer associates is not the time when you can focus clearly on long-term diversity efforts. Use the "off season" to examine your existing programs to ensure they are appropriately focused on diversity. After all, recruiting and retention go hand in hand.

Consider the programs you provide for summer associates. Do you offer a summer associate reception or lunch hosted by the firm's diversity committee? Do you offer your diverse attorneys other programming on mentoring and business development?



Recruiting and retaining diverse talent is a highly competitive business.

Mary Farrell Robinson, Director of Human Resources, DUANE MORRIS LLP



Members of your firm's diversity committee can help to guide you to diversity job fairs and regional and national conferences where your firm should be active. Meet regularly to explore opportunities throughout the year – not just during the summer recruiting season.

Duane Morris, for example, hosts an annual firmwide Diversity Retreat. Guest speakers, such as minority general counsel, join us to address issues concerning diverse attorneys, including leadership and marketing and business development strategies. In addition, throughout the year, we work with our Diversity Committee and our Women's Initiative to host receptions for women and minority law students.

LOOK IN-HOUSE FOR HELP

Work with the firm's diverse attorneys to enhance the firm's diversity programming and recruiting. Many of your current attorneys are your best resources, particularly those who are involved in diversity-related bar associations and other organizations. Seek out those individuals and find out what upcoming events they may be working on and see if there is a need for sponsorship.

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Another way that diverse attorneys at your firm can help to build awareness and advance diversity is through the Legal Diversity Pipeline Program. Established last summer by Street Law and NALP – The Association for Legal Career Professionals, the initiative pairs NALP member law firms with local high schools. The program commits practicing lawyers and other legal professionals to teaching law-related topics in high school classrooms.

ATTEND DIVERSITY JOB FAIRS

Dozens of diversity job fairs for lawyers are held throughout North America every year. Focus your efforts. Identify the diversity job fairs where you

can target new talent and remain visible, and consider job fair sponsorship opportunities to raise your firm's profile. Duane Morris participates in several diversity job fairs, including the Minority Corporate Counsel Association/Vault Diversity Career Fair, the Philadelphia Area Minority Job Fair, the Southeastern Minority Job Fair, and the Hispanic National Bar Association Annual Job Fair Program, for which it has been a major sponsor. Sponsoring a job fair will heighten your firm's visibility.

For example, check out the 21st Annual National LGBT Bar Association on September 9-12, 2009, in Brooklyn, New York, or plan to attend the National Society for Hispanic Professionals job fairs, held in the fall in Houston; Chicago; New York; Washington, D.C.; Los Angeles; Dallas; and Phoenix. The NAACP plans to host excellent professional job fairs in the following cities in spring/summer 2009: Minneapolis; Chicago; Los Angeles; Washington, D.C.; Philadelphia; Dallas; Boston; Atlanta; Pittsburgh; New York; and Denver.

DON'T REINVENT THE WHEEL

Use your resources. Organizations such as the Association of Legal Administrators, Minority Corporate Counsel Association, American Bar Association, NALP, and others have published material that can guide you as your firm develops its recruiting strategy with an eye toward diversity. Make sure to explore what other law firms are doing. To start, go to *Vault.com* and check out the Law Firm Diversity Database, an innovative online tool created by Vault and the Minority Corporate Counsel Association that evaluates major law firms' diversity-related activities. Ask your counterparts at other law firms what "tricks of the trade" they have learned – and you can share your best practice with them, too.

Recruiting diverse associates is always a best practice. In a down economy, think creatively to maximize your efforts to find the best diverse candidates for your firm.

FOCUS ON LAW SCHOOLS, STUDENTS

Identify the historically diverse law schools in your area and strengthen your relationships with them. Duane Morris interviews students at several historically black law schools, including Howard University, Texas Southern University, Southern University, and North Carolina Central University.

In addition to conducting on-campus interviews, consider participating in law school mock interview programs as well as receptions and mentoring programs for diverse law students. Research clerkship and fellowship programs for diverse law students, host events sponsored by diverse law student groups, and establish or contribute to minority law student scholarships. Any additional presence that you can maintain on campus will increase your visibility and help students to remember your firm.

USE DIVERSE RECRUITERS

Consider using women- and/or minority-owned executive search/recruiting firms in connection with lateral hires. Duane Morris has developed a network of recruiters who specialize in finding attorneys of color. It's a great way to attract diverse attorney talent and build your reputation as a diverse firm.

BOLSTER MARKETING MATERIALS

Your clients, potential clients, recruiters, lateral candidates, and the law students all want to know more about diversity at your firm. Develop and publicize diversity efforts through your firm's Web site, brochures, and recruiting presentations. Recently, Duane Morris completely revamped the Diversity area on its Web site and in print. The new materials include testimonials from clients

and other executives as well as success stories and other news from throughout the firm. The Web site's Diversity section is frequently refreshed with new content.

USE SPONSORSHIPS STRATEGICALLY

Are your sponsorship funds spread too thin? Look for opportunities to sponsor organizations strategically. Partner with your diversity committee and practice group heads to figure out how you can consolidate sponsorships to target the best organizations for your firm. Duane Morris is an active long-term sponsor of the Minority Corporate Counsel Association; it has sponsored the association's CLE Expo three times in the past five years and regularly sponsors regional events. The firm is also a major supporter of the Hispanic National Bar Association, among other diverse organizations.

IT'S WORTH THE EFFORT

Recruiting diverse associates is always a best practice. In a down economy, think creatively to maximize your efforts to find the best diverse candidates for your firm. Many excellent resources are available to guide you through this important process. ✱

about the author

Mary Farrell Robinson is the Director of Human Resources at Duane Morris LLP, where she leads and manages employee relations, staffing, and employee benefits. She has served the firm in this capacity since 1985 and has been active in the Association of Legal Administrators as a Board member and a writer for *Legal Management*. She is also a member of ALA's Committee on Diversity. Contact her at mfrobinson@duanemorris.com.