

Women of Color in Law Firms

Angela Payne James, Esq.

Women in Law Leadership Academy

November 8, 2007

The Issue

- Various studies and raw numbers indicate women of color are facing unique challenges in large law firms
- ABA's Commission on Women in the Profession 2006 Study, "*Visible Invisibility: Women of Color in Law Firms*"
 - 81% of minority female associates leave their law firms within five years of being hired (NALP, 2005)
- Concept of "Intersectionality" - Unique area where issues of gender and race overlap and are distinct from issues facing non-minority women and minority men

Unique Challenges Facing Women of Color in Law Firms

- Mentoring
- Support/Internal networking
- Double impact of racism/sexism
- Stereotypes and competency questions
- “No second chances” factor
- Different billable opportunities
- Lack of opportunity for “good work”
- Steered to practice areas where race/gender perceived as a benefit
- Limited business development opportunities
- Limited opportunities for partnership/advancement

Meeting the Challenges

- Establish broader/deeper mentoring efforts
- Create internal communities and inclusive work environment
- Afford external networking and professional business development opportunities
- Maintain flexibility in diversity initiatives
- Provide alternative paths to partnership
- Create mechanisms for outreach, feedback and response
- Establish buy-in, training and accountability at leadership levels
- Provide meaningful work, training, and client exposure
- Effective and inclusive recruiting