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Diversity – Law Firms

Kelley Drye: Inclusion And Diversity Thrive Despite Challenging Times

The Editor interviews Sarah L. Reid, Partner, Kelley Drye & Warren LLP and Chair of the Diversity & Inclusion Committee.

Editor: You have chaired Kelley Drye & Warren LLP's Diversity & Inclusion Committee since its creation in 2003. What changes and progress have you seen over the years at your firm?

Reid: Diversity has long been a core value at Kelley Drye. The firm created the Diversity & Inclusion Committee, consisting of partners and associates, as part of its commitment to ensuring Kelley Drye would continue to expand its actions in order to support our belief in the necessity and benefits of diversity. We then created a full-time position for a firm-wide diversity administrator who works with all of our offices on their diversity initiatives. I believe these efforts have led to increased numbers of diverse attorneys and an improved work experience for all lawyers at the firm.

Editor: Has the percentage of diverse attorneys at KDW been affected by the current economic downturn?

Reid: No, our diversity statistics show that we remain at or above the average percentage of diverse attorneys in New York City law firms. We are pleased and proud of that fact, given the current economic climate.

Editor: Has the economy adversely impacted Kelley Drye's diversity efforts?

Reid: I don't believe so. I did see the ABA recently reported that within the

legal profession the recession has been undermining many diversity programs. This has not been the case at Kelley Drye. We continue to commit time and resources to diversity programming, supporting our attorneys and participating in outreach efforts to increase diversity in the profession. We understand the business reality that in a global economy diverse attorneys best serve our clients, who are industry leaders from a wide variety of backgrounds, just as we have developed more nuanced understandings of the wide range in definitions of diversity.



Sarah L. Reid

Editor: Were you able to expand diversity efforts last year?

Reid: Yes, Kelley Drye actively expanded its efforts.

Editor: In what way?

Reid: One example is our increased activity in the LGBT legal community. In addition to our long-term support of organizations like Services & Advocacy for GLBT Elders (SAGE), we are also active sponsors of the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD). For example, our associates participated in a workshop sponsored by SAGE for the elderly gay community in Harlem to help them with wills and estate planning. In September, the firm hosted a reception welcoming GLAAD's new president, Jarrett Tomás Barrios. One of our partners,

Donna Wilson, who is an active board member of GLAAD, was instrumental in organizing this event at Kelley Drye.

Editor: What other diversity initiatives did you sponsor last year?

Reid: In 2008, we established our Diversity Speaker Series. We work with our clients to arrange for in-house counsel of various backgrounds to speak with our associates about their careers, addressing their obstacles and achievements. Each year, we try to have at least two of these sessions. Our most recent speaker was Rochelle Noel from Cablevision. Ms. Noel is a senior employment attorney at Cablevision responsible for overseeing compliance with employment laws, and employment litigation and advising on employment law matters for Cablevision. Ms. Noel spoke with our female associates about her career and achievements and offered excellent advice about managing work and family.

Editor: As the senior woman partner at Kelley Drye, I understand you organized the Women Partners Group some years ago. Can you describe this group, and some of its activities during the past year?

Reid: One of the nicest things about Kelley Drye is its collegial atmosphere. We really do enjoy and support one another despite our different backgrounds and areas of interest. I started informal meetings of the women partners several years ago. We now meet firmwide at least three times annually, and monthly in the DC and NY offices. Our initial meetings were focused on individual coaching for mar-

Please email the interviewee at sreid@kelleydrye.com with questions about this interview.

keting and developing client opportunities. We also meet with and mentor our women associates, and try to stay on top of the issues affecting women lawyers in this market. During the last year, as examples of just a few activities, our women partners have hosted dinners for women clients, held a brunch at the home of one of our DC partners for our women associates, and hosted a forum for the National Council for Research on Women Global Leadership Development where Barbara Hoey, co-chair of our Labor and Employment practice group, is a board member.

Editor: You mentioned the women partners are a diverse group themselves. What did you mean?

Reid: We are a real mixture, with practices in all areas of the firm from venture capital led by our senior woman corporate partner, Jane Jablons, to litigation, which is my area. Many of us are married and some are not. Many of us have raised or are raising children. We come from different religious backgrounds and include a prominent Japanese American attorney, Susan Onuma, who was the first woman president of the Japanese American Association of New York. Despite all this, or perhaps because of it, there is a cohesiveness to the group which I think is quite unusual.

Editor: I also understand the firm has a very robust women associates affinity group. How did that come about?

Reid: Women At KDW was founded in 2006 by three women associates to provide support and enhance the professional development of Kelley Drye's women associates firmwide. Bi-monthly events offer networking, mentoring, and learning opportunities. These include informal social gatherings and more structured activities. For example, last year an in-house women partners panel discussed various paths for successful law firm careers. The group hosted a class on "Mastering the Art of Oral Communication: A Seminar for Women Lawyers." Legal Momentum, the nation's oldest legal defense and education fund dedicated to advancing the rights of all women and girls, gave a presentation on the current term Supreme Court cases of particular interest to women. The group also organized a joint partner-associate

cocktail hour, a wine and cheese social, and a chocolate tasting. Women At KDW works with the Professional Development, and Diversity & Inclusion Committees, as well as the Women Partners Group, to provide opportunities for women associates. It also serves as a forum for women attorneys to raise concerns and discuss ideas to present to the firm.

Editor: Is the firm still partnering with its clients on diversity issues? Can you describe some of Kelley Drye's diversity-related client partnerships?

Reid: As discussed, our Diversity Speaker Series, which features clients is a crucial component of our diversity mission.

The firm has partnered with its client JPMorgan Chase for a split summer program where summer associates are chosen each year to spend half of the summer at Kelley Drye, and the second half working in Chase's legal office learning about the financial industry and the legal issues from the client's perspective.

Editor: In addition to a focus on attorneys, Kelley Drye also supports student-outreach initiatives. What's the motivation behind these efforts?

Reid: One of the biggest challenges for the legal profession is to make sure sufficient minorities become lawyers. To ensure the increase of diversity of attorneys, there must be a constant pool of diverse candidates in the pipeline to enter the field in the future. We feel all law firms need to participate in these efforts, so we can collectively accomplish goals that are critical to the legal profession. By providing an annual summer associate position for a first year law student through our participation in the NYC Bar Diversity Fellowship, and providing internships for high school students through the Cristo Rey Corporate Work Study Program, Thurgood Marshall Summer Law Program, and the Inner-City Scholarship Fund Job Opportunities Program, we encourage students with various backgrounds to consider pursuing a career in law where they might not have otherwise. These types of opportunities establish formal and informal mentoring relationships and concretely demonstrate to young people that it is possible for them to have successful legal careers.

Editor: Kelley Drye's diversity initiatives are firmwide, but are there also office specific programs you'd like to highlight?

Reid: Yes, I'd especially like to focus on our DC office, which actively participates in several programs. As one example of an interesting outreach, there's what is called the DC Road Show. This program was founded four decades ago by major DC firms, who would "go on the road" to visit law schools to encourage African American students to start their legal careers at DC firms. It has evolved from an informal setting into a panel program. Last year, Kelley Drye coordinated the Road Show at UVA and participated in Road Shows at GWU and Georgetown. We'll be doing this again in the upcoming year.

The DC office has also established a Mock Interview Week, where students from DC-area law schools participate. This program provides second year law students with the opportunity to have mock interviews with Kelley Drye attorneys prior to the start of the fall recruiting season, and provides valuable practice before the start of actual recruiting season.

We are fortunate to have such active partner and associate members of the Diversity & Inclusion Committee in DC, as headed by international trade partner Kathy Cannon. They have provided inspiration to us all.

Editor: Looking forward to the coming year, what other kinds of innovative diversity programs does Kelley Drye plan to explore?

Reid: Going forward, while we will continue our current activities, we also need to seek ways to expand them to benefit the firm, our lawyers, our clients, students, the communities in which we do business, and the profession, overall. One of our goals for this year is to establish a formal Supplier Diversity Program which will track our use of women- and minority-owned businesses and LGBT-owned businesses for procurement and sourcing opportunities. The impetus for this effort comes from some of our clients who have focused on this issue. It is another way to ensure that the vendors we do business with also reflect the diversity of the various markets we serve.