Marketing the Program

Program Title

Gender Equity in Partner Compensation: Why It Matters and How to Do It

Program Description

Money matters. It connotes power, indicates success, and reveals a lawyer’s value to the firm. When a firm’s compensation practices do not provide equal pay for equal work, women leave.

In the nation’s largest firms, women earn substantially less than men, as shown by ABA research and studies by other independent groups. The compensation gap persists even when hours and business development are equal. The gap widens with each step up the law firm ladder, all the way into the level of equity partners, where the greatest disparity exists. The highest-paid lawyers in firms are almost invariably male. The data is even more troubling for women of color, who generally earn less than both men (white men and men of color) and white women.

Pay inequities are a significant source of dissatisfaction for women partners, who leave firms in greater numbers than men to work in organizations where their contributions are more fairly valued. Gender bias limits a firm’s ability to maintain a robust pool of talented partners and diverse leaders. Year after year, the percentage of women equity partners in the nation’s largest firms has been stuck at about 15%. Only about 5% of firm-wide managing partners are female. Even today, half of the nation’s 200 largest firms have only one woman or no women at all serving on their highest governing committee.

The resulting talent drain is severe, affecting the bottom line. Firms lose their investment in talented lawyers and lose the potential revenue that women could generate if they remained in the firm. Attrition stunts a firm’s ability to develop women as law firm leaders. Attrition flies in the face of client demands for firms to provide consistent, diverse, and gender-balanced client service teams. If today’s firms are to survive and thrive, they must retain, promote, and fairly reward talented women lawyers.

Now is the time to achieve solutions: new ways for sharing origination credit, rewarding client development, recognizing contributions to firm growth, and implementing compensation systems that are viewed from diverse perspectives as fair and transparent. This program will give bar and law firm leaders the tools they need to address the gender pay gap, including the business case for why equitable pay must be a priority for law firms. Participants will come away with practical tips for taking the steps needed to achieve gender equity in compensation.
Audience

It is important for firm leaders who are in the best position to make changes in law firm compensation practices to attend the program. Here are a few ideas that may help attract decision-makers:

- Ask prominent general counsel in your area to participate in the program and to invite managing partners from their outside law firms to attend.
- Ask prominent law firm chairs and managing partners to participate and to invite his/her peers from other firms.
- Ask accounting firms and other professional services firms that work with local law firms to host or sponsor programs.

Suggested Dates

A way to build momentum for your program is to tie it to a nationally-recognized date related to pay equity. A few suggestions are:

Equal Pay Day – This date changes each year, as it is calculated to show how much longer a woman must work in order to have earned the same amount her male counterpart earned by December 31 in the prior year. Equal Pay Day this year is April 9, 2013.

Equal Pay Act Anniversary – June 10 is the anniversary of the passage of the Equal Pay Act (EPA), a federal law that prohibits wage discrimination on the basis of sex. Congress enacted the EPA in 1963 to remedy the wage disparity faced by women.

International Women’s Day – March 8 is observed in many countries around the world, including in many U.S. communities.

Anniversary of the Swearing-in of Sandra Day O’Connor – The first woman justice on the U.S. Supreme Court was sworn in on September 25, 1981.

This is a project of the ABA Presidential Task Force on Gender Equity and the Commission on Women in the Profession. www.americanbar.org/GenderEquity