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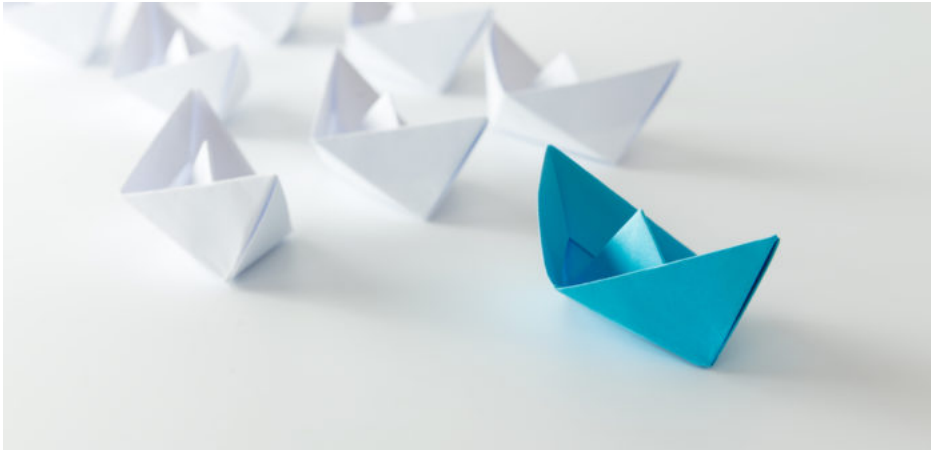
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LCLD's Role in Transformational Change in the Legal Industry

BY MICHAEL NESTOR ON OCTOBER 5, 2022 ·



When my firm's director of diversity, equity and inclusion approached our management committee to recommend that we become a member of the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity (LCLD), it took two minutes (or less) of research to understand the impact that LCLD has had and will have on sponsorship and promotion of diversity in the legal profession. Composed of more than 400 corporate and law firm leaders, LCLD's goal is to focus on thoughtful planning, extensive opportunities for education and promotion, and the establishment of ambitious and historic tangible objectives for the member institutions and the legal practice as a whole. The answer was easy.

It is hard to summarize all that LCLD does. With an objective as important as improving diversity in the legal industry and opportunities for the under-represented, there is no room for pause and every reason to press the accelerator in many different directions. It has been approximately a year since my firm joined LCLD. Actually, firms cannot just "join" LCLD. Membership involves three mandatory components that are designed to achieve LCLD's goal of building a "more perfect union": (1) the "pledge"; (2) education and action; and (3) accountability. Each component provides a collaborative platform for success.

- **The pledge:** LCLD is not an organization that requires an annual fee, schedules a few events per year, and offers CLE's for its members. The goal of LCLD is directed through action from Day 1 – each firm is obligated to draft and account for a pledge that details the member firm's specific, meaningful, and measurable goals. My limited experience instructs that the pledge is a flexible tool that is subject to change and evolution based upon our experience with LCLD, our firms/companies, and our communities.
- **Objective-driven education and action:** LCLD itself leads through action, by offering interactive programs designed to expand the breadth of our professional, leadership, and relationship experiences and training at all levels of our respective organizations. LCLD offers leadership opportunities to junior attorneys (Pathfinders), mid-career attorneys (Fellows), and law firm leaders/general counsel. LCLD also provides



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opportunities for diverse law students to partner with and be mentored by LCLD members (Scholars), with the goal of strengthening and expanding the legal pipeline for diverse law students.

- **Accountability:** Success in any action plan requires accountability, a crucial component of LCLD's impact on the legal industry. LCLD requires its members to hold each other accountable through active engagement in programming, tracking and revising pledges and objectives to assess success, adjust for experience, and, as detailed above, provide myriad opportunities to inform and educate member firms.

My firm is in year one of our LCLD commitment, but we have learned so much in such a short time. First, change means discomfort, since comfort breeds complacency (the opposite of change). The key to moving the process forward is to understand when to push discomfort and when to pull back. LCLD provides its members with powerful educational tools and resources to ensure that the members can push and pull in a manner that will effect meaningful change.

Second, it is critical to put any work plan, LCLD or otherwise, on paper to be able to focus, review, revise, and account for as appropriate. More importantly, putting your plan on paper (or your preferred screen) gets you out of your seat toward whatever goal you wish to achieve. While my firm has worked hundreds of hours developing and establishing a comprehensive DEI action plan, and we are incredibly proud of it, the firm's pledge represents a collective and historic step with the entire LCLD membership.

Finally, the pledge for me has been a fascinating and rewarding evolution. After reviewing those of other LCLD members, I initially decided to go with a narrow set of objectives, based upon the belief that smaller goals are the key to success. However, unable to sufficiently narrow the necessary progress, I flipped to a pledge with many goals, but were achievable ones. After attending an LCLD leadership summit over the summer, I realized that my pledge, while lofty in goals, was lacking in objectivity such that it was difficult to measure. When I started to restructure the pledge based on what I had learned at the leadership summit, I had an epiphany – why limit the pledge to only me and my firm? We are based in Wilmington, Delaware, a relatively small community, and a much smaller legal community. As a result, it is possible in Delaware to make a much bigger impact on the bar and the community – IF – the Delaware member LCLD firms initially, and all Delaware firms collectively, joined together to craft specific and trackable goals to make the historic and lasting change. When I approached the other Delaware LCLD firms, I learned that I was pushing an open door. In just a short time, we have drafted a “Delaware pledge” which we intend to roll out to the Delaware community (legal and otherwise) in the coming months, and are enthusiastic to implement and track going forward.

I'll close where I opened – with another recommendation from our DEI director. When she first joined the firm, she asked us to “consider DEI in every decision made by the firm, large or small.” That request has stuck with me, has become a commitment of our firm's management, and is something that we, in fact, consider in every decision that we make. Importantly, that advice and the incredible platform, support and accountability offered by LCLD, has positioned my firm and the Delaware LCLD member firms to be able to identify DEI initiatives, track progress, and do everything possible to achieve the goal of LCLD (and what should be the goal of every firm and company) – to build a more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and perfect union.

About the Author

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