

THIRD ANNUAL DIVERSITY CHAMPION AWARD

MICHAEL A. CARDOZO

Overview:

As head of the New York City Law Department, Michael Cardozo has worked continuously since his appointment on January 1, 2002 to enhance diversity within the legal profession. Truly embodying the ideals set forth in the City Bar's Statement of Diversity Principles, Mr. Cardozo has focused on the hiring, retention and promotion of ethnically diverse attorneys as well as gay and lesbian attorneys and attorneys with disabilities. He emphasizes the importance of "quality of life" issues as a means of fostering a diverse workplace and has addressed work-life balance issues, including maternity leave and part-time status, which have been of particular interest to women attorneys in the office. Mr. Cardozo also goes beyond his position as New York City's 77th Corporation Counsel to promote diverse issues. He is active in promoting the City Bar's goals for in-house law departments by spear-heading the City's initiative to hire more minority and women-owned law firms where it has been deemed necessary to hire outside counsel. Reaching out to the non-legal community, he also encourages diverse high school students to consider law as a career option.

Upon taking office, Mr. Cardozo initiated a process of identifying the core values, mission and vision of the agency and identified diversity as one of these core values. He emphasized that maintaining a diverse legal staff at all responsibility levels is critical to the success of the office and it is through his leadership that he has influenced others to value diversity in hiring. Holding himself and those who report to him accountable for diversity, Mr. Cardozo has created a diverse leadership team at the New York City Law Department and has been a role model to his staff and the greater New York community.

Results:

Michael Cardozo has introduced and supported numerous initiatives that have contributed to the diverse culture of the Law Department. One of his first decisions after joining the office was to report the number of openly gay and lesbian attorneys, along with other demographic information, on the National Association for Law Placement (NALP) annual reporting form. Since the office began reporting these statistics, the number of openly gay and lesbian attorneys has more than doubled from 16 in 2002 to 41 in the 2008 NALP report. The Law Department has the largest number of openly gay and lesbian attorneys of any of the 1,700 legal employers reporting their statistics to NALP. 40% of these gay and lesbian attorneys are in supervisory positions, including two division chiefs. The percentage of ethnically diverse attorneys has risen from 13% to an all-time high of 20.2% during Mr. Cardozo's six-year tenure. If ranked among the largest 100 largest private law firms in New York City, the Law Department would rank 4th overall in ethnic diversity. None of the 100 largest private law firms in New York City had a higher combined percentage of African-American and Hispanic attorneys (13.7%) (New York Law Journal, Book of Lists 2008). Diversity among the Law Department's newest attorneys reached a high of 39% with the September 2006 entry class. This compares favorably with the nationwide diversity of law school graduation classes in the same period, which has averaged about 20%.

The Law Department has also made strides in recruiting disabled attorneys. In its most recent NALP survey form, the Law Department reported employing 11 disabled attorneys. Remarkably, this represents more than 5% of all the disabled attorneys reported to NALP this past year in the entire country. The Law Department participated in the first annual Impact Job Fair, which focuses on disabled law students, and makes an extra effort to accommodate new employees who identify as disabled. For example, a disabled attorney in the 2005 entry class was invited to tour the office nine months prior to her official start date so that any major modifications she might need could be completed well before her arrival.

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Mr. Cardozo has also focused on the process by which attorneys are promoted to supervisory positions, and he has increased leadership opportunities for both minorities and women. Currently 5 of the 17 divisions are led by African-American, Hispanic or openly gay attorneys. In the past five years, the number of diverse supervisors, division chiefs and managers has doubled. Seven of the Law Department's 17 divisions are currently led by women. These divisions, including the Law Department largest division, represent more than half of the legal staff of the Law Department.

For diversity recruitment efforts to be truly successful, one must also be successful in the retention of diverse attorneys. Through Mr. Cardozo's concerted efforts, diverse attorneys stay at the Law Department as long as their non-diverse colleagues. Some of his initiatives that have successfully enhanced diversity retention include: Formation of a Diversity Committee; Surveying the Law Department; Diversity Training; Focus Groups; Attorney and Staff Quality of Life Committees; Formal Mentoring Program; Formation of a Women's Committee; Increased Opportunities for Part-Time Work; and a Work-at-Home Policy.

Mr. Cardozo has also fostered diversity in the legal profession by reaching out to educate the community about the City Law Department and the entire legal profession. Serving as "principal for a day" at several City public high schools, Mr. Cardozo also encourages Law Department attorneys to coach high school mock trial teams. The Law Department is currently working with several schools to prepare them for the New York State Bar Association high school mock trial competition and also participates in an "Adopt a School" program, where they work with one public high school for a year, sending speakers who talk about the law and the legal profession and inviting students to visit the Law Department.

Success Factors:

- Be courageous to hold oneself and others directly accountable for promoting diversity objectives within the organization. Start by being a role model.
- Conduct focus groups to gain insight among the lawyers and staff relating to diversity, mentoring and work/life balance. Then work on specific action steps to bridge any gaps.
- Propose and support specific initiatives that will contribute to an overall change in the culture of the organization.
- Limited financial resources often create limited diversity programs. Be creative about obtaining resources and be open to non-financial resources.

Background:

Michael Cardozo is New York City's 77th Corporation Counsel. As chief legal officer, he serves as counsel to the Mayor, elected officials, the City and its agencies and has an active caseload of more than 90,000 lawsuits and legal matters being handled by 690 attorneys in 17 divisions. Prior to his appointment, Cardozo was a senior partner at Proskauer Rose LLP, one of New York City's largest law firms. Cardozo joined the firm in 1967 and was elected to the firm's executive committee three times. He co-chaired its Litigation Department from 1987 to 1991. Prior to joining the firm, Cardozo was a law clerk in the chambers of the late Hon. Edward C. McClean in the Southern District of New York. From 1996 to 1998, Cardozo served as President of the New York City Bar, where he has worked on numerous committees for over 30 years. He was Chair of Fund for Modern Courts, a non-partisan citizen organization devoted to improving New York State courts, and previously chaired two court system task forces appointed by Gov. Cuomo and Chief Judge Wachler. He is a fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers and a member of the American Law Institute, the Board of Directors of the Federal Bar Council Foundation, the Board of Visitors of Columbia Law School (which he previously chaired), the Board of Trustees of the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, and the Anti-Defamation League. Cardozo earned his J.D. at Columbia Law School in 1966, where he was an editor of its Law Review and is currently the Chair of its Board of Visitors. He received his B.A. from Brown University in 1963.