

Why Your Firm Should Have Retreats for Minority Attys

Law360

05.11.2015

Related People:

Catherine A. Mohan

With hopes of retaining minority lawyers, several BigLaw firms host special retreats for their diverse attorneys to network and discuss inclusion issues.

“There is a great need out in the world for diverse lawyers, and there is a limited pool of talent,” said Catherine A. Mohan, a McCarter & English LLP partner and member of the firm’s diversity committee. “More and more law firms understand how important it is, and because of that, many of them consider doing retreats as part of their diversity programs.”

Here’s what your firm could gain by following suit.

Minority associates can be dissuaded by a lack of apparent diversity in the partnership of their offices. But attending diversity and inclusion retreats gives these associates the chance to meet partners at the firm that come from similar backgrounds — and even find new mentors.

The team at McCarter & English, which has been hosting its retreat for the past seven years, has had new ideas for its minority associates — such as a first-year law program specifically for minority lawyers and a diversity mentorship program — come out of its retreat, according to Mohan.

It’s important to put such programs into place and to encourage mentorships in order to retain diverse associates, given the tough competition from other firms and corporations seeking out the same minority lawyers.

“It’s very competitive out there,” Mohan said. “I have had a diverse associate who worked for me for eight years — who clearly would be [promoted to] partner at McCarter & English — plucked out from me to get a great job in-house. It is imperative for law firms to promote diverse associates, since we’re competing with our clients who are trying to go after the same pool of candidates.”

A key component to these retreats is the participation by firm leadership in vital conversations about the issues that their minority employees face on a day-to-day basis and ways to make the firm feel more inclusive.

And according to Mohan, such discussions are a true win-win situation for firms.

“The diverse lawyers feel like they have a chance to tell management what they like and what they don’t like, and we get great ideas,” Mohan said. “The retreat is definitely a two-way

street for the management of the firm and for the diverse attorneys that attend the retreat.”