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Diversity Spotlight

Reed Smith again sets gold standard for providing leadership roles for women

by Tracy Carbasho

Reed Smith has been singled out again as a stellar example of what a law firm can do to help women realize their full potential in the legal profession.

The Women in Law Empowerment Forum (WILEF), a New York-based organization that provides educational and networking opportunities, awarded the firm its Gold Standard Certification in June for the second year in a row. The certification focuses on the leadership roles achieved by equity women partners rather than a firm's policies, practices, or the overall number and percentage of women in the partnership.

"Our focus on diversity and women's initiatives is driven by our goal to recruit and develop the best talent we can," said Gregory Jordan, the global managing partner for Reed Smith. "When a firm focuses on the recruitment of outstanding women and then supports their development and promotion in the firm, the numbers follow, and as talent rises, these outstanding women assume high levels of leadership throughout the firm."

"Success on this issue is critical for all firms that want to compete at the highest levels," he added. "Diverse teams perform better and diverse firms are more attractive to the increasingly diverse clients who hire us."

Jordan said law firms must take decisive steps and make a conscious effort to enhance diversity. In particular,



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—Alicia Powell, Chair of the Women's Initiative Network of Reed Smith



he said successfully elevating women to leadership positions requires a clear commitment from a firm and its top management, the use of metrics to measure and perpetuate progress, and a steadfast focus on the issue in connection with all key personnel decisions.

"Our success in retaining and developing women has allowed us to be very focused on promoting more women to partners; advancing more women into practice group, office management and leadership positions; as well as into leadership roles on the senior management team and the global board of the firm; and supporting our women in leading some of our largest client teams," said Jordan.

The firm implemented its Women's Initiative Network of Reed Smith (WINRS) approximately 10 years ago and has seen a significant improvement in recruitment and retention over the past decade.

Alicia Powell, who chairs the initiative for Reed Smith's Pittsburgh Office, stressed that leadership talent is not an exclusive trait of either gender and that both men

and women are well suited to manage others in the practice of law.

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Powell said providing women with a mentor and a sponsor is one of the best ways for a firm to prepare them to transition into leadership roles at every level. She provided numbers for Reed Smith's Pittsburgh office that show women comprise 23 percent of the partners and 39 percent of the associates and counsel.

The WILEF certification is based on the firm's global numbers. The more than 600 female lawyers at Reed Smith now account for about 21 percent of the total partnership; 41 percent of all counsel; and 54 percent of all associates. Women also account for 23.5 percent of all leadership positions and 27 percent of the firm's Compensation and Promotion Committee.

In order to earn the Gold Standard Certification from WILEF, a firm must meet at least three of six criteria. Reed Smith was one of only three of the 50 qualifying firms that met all six of the requirements.

The WILEF guidelines stipulate that women must: * Account for at least 20 percent of equity partners; * Represent at least 10 percent of the firm chairs and office managing partners; * Make up at least 20 percent of the firm's primary governance committee; * Represent 20 percent or more of the firm's compensation committee; * Make up at least 25 percent of practice group leaders or department heads; * Represent at least 10 percent of the top half of the most highly compensated partners.

Alysia Keating, director of diversity and gender equality for the Allegheny County Bar Association, pointed out that four other firms with offices in Pittsburgh also achieved the gold certification although they did not meet all six criteria. They are K&L Gates, Littler Mendelson, Pepper Hamilton, and Fulbright & Jaworski.

"Larger firms that are committed to similarly advancing women into positions of power and leadership might look to the example of Reed Smith in setting up women's initiatives," said Keating. "Smaller firms may look to outside resources, like the ACBA's Institute for Gender Equality, to offer programming to their women attorneys."

She added that any law firm with 100 or more practicing attorneys is eligible to apply for the WILEF Gold Standard Certification, and she encourages Pittsburgh firms to consider it.

"Reed Smith has demonstrated a commitment to advancing women by not only providing pathways to positions of leadership and success, but by also having them achieve those positions of leadership and success," said Keating. "This is the kind of equality we should all be working toward." ■

The Diversity Spotlight highlights work that firms, organizations, and individuals are doing to create opportunities for women and other diverse attorneys. If you know a firm, organization or individual who should be featured, please contact Alysia Keating at 412-402-6658 or akeating@acba.org.