

Engaging men in women's activities



In the latest installment of the best practice series, group members discuss the importance of the role played by men in advancing the female talent pipeline and promoting diversity.

Arthur Cox

By head of HR **Ruth D'Alton**

Although our Women in the Firm Initiative started organically by women partners to advance the prospects of women in the firm and support them, there has been active support from various key members of the men within the partnership to support its advancement. This includes the active involvement of both the chairman, who has put gender discussions on the agenda of partners' meetings, and the managing partner, who has supported various initiatives and programmes by launching them and ensuring that he attends in person to raise the profile of the event. The managing partner has also supported the women in the firm when they sponsor external networking events, including the WXN.

More recently, the managing partner chose to appoint two diversity partners to head up this area

and ensure it got due attention and promotion within the firm. A key requirement of this was that one of the diversity partners was a man. The appointed partner also sits on the policy committee, which is the key group that makes decisions regarding promotion and remuneration.

The firm acknowledges the importance of men being incorporated into any policies relating to family life. With this in mind, a new Shared Parenting Leave policy is being rolled out firm-wide, in advance of any legislation that requires this in Ireland. In addition, the firm is paying fathers their normal salary for up to 13 weeks of this time, should they choose to avail of it. This is the first policy of its kind in Ireland and it represents the firm's desire to be a trailblazer in all areas of diversity, particularly gender diversity.



Ruth D'Alton

DLA Piper

By partner **Andrew Darwin**

I believe one of the barriers to progress in gender diversity is making men more comfortable in engaging with and talking about the issue. Men are inhibited by concerns that they may be embarrassed or even worse, trigger a legal or human resources problem. I have just returned from two years in Australia and my perspective is that there is a more open debate there, which creates a healthier environment for engagement.

How might we do that? As always, there's no silver bullet. Senior leadership has a major role to play (including by demonstrating that they are comfortable with an open and practical dialogue). Using the available data is also important - we all feel more confident when things are fact-based. And the women have an important role to play, by engaging empathetically with their male colleagues and avoiding



Andrew Darwin

an exclusive style of approach which makes it harder for the men to engage.

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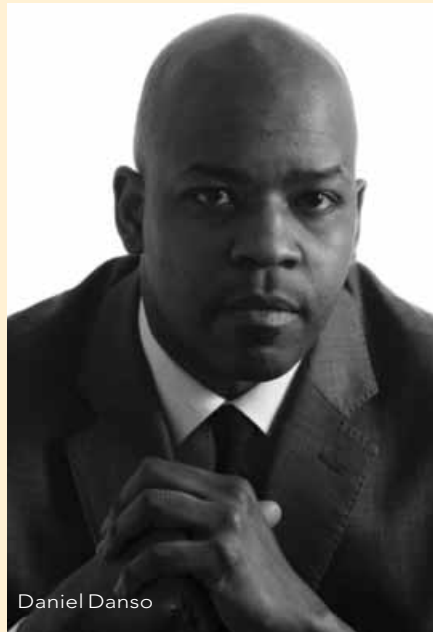
under which this can occur and men have a responsibility to educate themselves so that the fear of looking foolish is not a barrier.

Linklaters

By diversity manager **Daniel Danso**

The most powerful messages of inclusion come from people who are not part of the group they are fighting for. Continuing to create messages about minority groups aimed at minority groups, means that the majority will never fully realise their potential and responsibility at creating change; whatever the characteristic. If homophobia and racism could be dealt with by the LGB&T and the BAME [black, Asian and minority ethnic] community alone it would have been done by now. If women alone could destroy the pay gap, glass ceiling and limiting assumptions about their gender, it would have been done by now. We need our straight colleagues to champion equality for our LGB&T colleagues. We need the white majority to champion the equality of those in the ethnic minority, and yes, we need men to champion the rights of women. Without this championship on a broad scale, change will be a long time coming.

At Linklaters we fundamentally understand



Daniel Danso

that to ensure a meritocracy exists for women, we have to address the things that challenge merit. Groups like the 30% Cub, Catalyst, Opportunity Now and Tomorrows Company all talk openly about the need for male participation in this debate. It is the reason why we focus on getting people to understand how they 'fit into diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives. It's why we focus on meaningful training, give our people tangible ways to be actively inclusive and ensure that men know they are included in gender equality and not the victims of it. We are doing our part to ensure that the working lives of men and women are as free from bias as possible. We are transparent with our people, clients and communities about our promotion and development of our talent. While public awards are great, they just prove that we are on the right track; but more work needs to be done. Being leaders in D&I isn't just a great thing to do, it is essential for the success of our firm and everyone has a part to play.

Shearman & Sterling

By partner **Donna Parisi**

Diversity initiatives are not just the right thing to do, but rather a business imperative. Diversity of thought, approach, action and style produces superior results and is a win-win for every organisation. Men who understand this are easily engaged and, in fact, eager to participate and support gender initiatives. Key to the success of diversity initiatives is the buy in of leaders of an organisation, and the reality is that men comprise a majority of individuals in formal and informal leadership positions. That is why engaging men in diversity initiatives should be high on the agenda of gender diversity programs – without committed male allies, these programmes will be of limited success.

An often unspoken barrier to engaging men in gender initiatives is the mistaken notion that women are seeking to take something away from men – 're-slice the pie', so to speak. In reality, gender initiatives are seeking to 'grow the pie' for the benefit of all in an organisation. Gender initiatives are one way to ensure a high return on investment on talent recruitment and retention and can be a natural incubator for new ideas and thought leadership, all of which in turn can lead to increased profitability.

Shearman & Sterling has a steadfast commitment to advancing women, evident from the buy in of senior management on gender initiatives. For the past two years, the firm has been using social media to build strong relationships among women in law and business. Even more critical is the firm's strong group of senior women who hold positions of influence



Donna Parisi

(eg practice leads, industry and client leads, firm leadership) and have focussed the firm on the importance of gender initiatives and their impact on the bottom line. As such, Shearman & Sterling employs a global, holistic and integrated approach to internally and externally-focussed gender initiatives addressing recruitment, retention, promotion, leadership and most importantly client service and engagement.

So how to engage men in women's initiatives?

In my experience, the best way is to keep talking to both men and women regarding the importance, benefits, barriers and challenges of gender initiatives, both to the organisation and the individual. The barriers include the unconscious bias that encourages all of us – men and women – to choose to work with people who are 'like them'. Another common barrier is stereotypical notions of what constitutes acceptable behavior for women – women in the workplace are expected to be 'tough as nails' yet 'as warm as toast'. Female behaviours that fall outside this narrow band are often labeled ineffective or worse. Organisations should consider whether this is an issue and if so, how best to address it. Finally, men should feel safe sponsoring, and not just mentoring, a female colleague when they believe in her talent and ability to contribute to the organisation. Doing so sends a powerful message, as a sponsor goes out on a limb and puts their personal and professional reputation on the line to promote someone else and signal that this person truly has what it takes to succeed.

The truth is that gender initiatives that do not engage men will be of limited success. Men have been excluded from discussions on gender diversity, which, ironically, is keeping well-meaning allies from speaking up and taking action. Too many people still think of gender diversity efforts as a zero sum game, a pie with a set number of slices. The savvier perspective is that once we commit to working together to grow the pie, there will inevitably be more opportunities for success for all involved.

Sidley Austin

By counsel, **Shireen Khoo**

It is easy to say that law firms need to make more of an effort to retain women and promote them to higher leadership positions. But one wonders how initiatives aimed at doing exactly this will succeed if both men and women are not actively engaged in those initiatives. Not only is this in the spirit of what we are trying to achieve (ie equal opportunities for both men and women), it is important for men (as well as women) to understand why there is a dearth of women in leadership positions and why it is important that women are given the opportunity to lead. At the end of 2012, my firm decided that it wanted facts as opposed to anecdotal evidence regarding issues concerning the retention of women lawyers. It established a task force to do just this, as well as to implement actions determined to be helpful in addressing the issues identified. Importantly, this task force was, and remains, composed of both male and female partners. An interesting fact that surfaced from questionnaires distributed to all male and female attorneys in the US offices was that a higher percentage of female, compared to male, lawyers are interested in leadership positions within the firm. This and other relatively contra-intuitive data was not only surprising to the task force, it has led to certain of the male members of the task force becoming the most vociferous proponents of change.

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Some of these changes are small (for example, making women's committee social events open to both men and women, or holding meetings at lunchtime instead of the morning or early evening when children need to be taken to, or picked up from, school). And some involve a grassroots shift of working culture being made throughout the firm across multiple continents (for example, reducing the stigma attached to working from home). While it is still early days



Shireen Khoo

and there is work to be done, changes are beginning to take root that could lead to an ultimate shift in culture enhancing both the daily work environment and business generation. This is because men are beginning to realise that they can benefit from these changes as much as women can. This, at the end of the day, is the fundamental rationale for engaging men in women's initiatives.

Simmons & Simmons

By corporate responsibility and diversity manager **Jo Perry**

Gender balance and the retention and progression of our female colleagues and partners is a key business priority at Simmons & Simmons. We understand that continued progress requires the collaboration and support of a number of key stakeholders across the firm – it is not an issue concerning women that needs to be resolved by women.

Accordingly, our gender balance programme is led by our senior partner and managing partner. They are supported by a gender balance steering group. The group, comprised of group heads, partners, managing associates and HR representatives is gender balanced and accountable for helping to set the agenda, raise awareness, influence policy and process and to drive cultural change. The group is accountable and progress is tracked.

We also have a very active women's network – The Number One Club. One of the network's key aims is to enable greater opportunities for developing relationships with our female clients through Plus One events. These events are open



Jo Perry

Continued progress requires the collaboration and support of a number of key stakeholders across the firm

to everyone in the firm (male and female) to attend with a female contact. Previous events include talks given by Shami Chakrabarti, Katherine Grainger and the FT's Mrs Monypenny, a private film screening at BAFTA (in

conjunction with Women for Women International), art tours and a panel discussion chaired by Justin Webb about recruiting and retaining female talent in conjunction with a key client of the firm.

White & Case

By partner **Ian Bagshaw**

Addressing the gender imbalance in law firms is a fundamental issue for the next decade. Law firms need a sustainable and holistic way of engaging male-heavy partnerships in women's initiatives to create an environment where female talent can flourish.

Women enter the legal profession in the majority, yet scarce are the female leaders of top tier firms. Leadership of law firms should reflect the clients we advise and we must and should respond to the pressure from clients cognisant of this under-representation who are seeking to influence their advisers.

No one size solution fits all, but the creation of a talent nurturing environment that anticipates the different impediments to success faced by female (and also male associates) and seeks to put a constructive framework in place to help resolve any impediments before they become too material to the individual will be key. This means plenty of support throughout, not crisis support when an impediment seems too big.

Don't wait to grow role models internally – consider deploying the use of coaches and external mentors and don't be afraid to trailblaze. At White & Case, we recently introduced an externally run female coaching programme in our corporate group. This programme takes a grass-



Ian Bagshaw

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roots approach to capture those who might prematurely opt out of private practice early in their careers and to assist in propelling senior females at the firm into partnership roles.

We can learn and share experiences by collaborating with corporations and organisations outside the legal profession who have already proved successful in creating a workplace where their female talent flourishes. This is a collective issue. No one senior partner can have the right per-

spective, as generational change means the issues of a decade ago are not necessarily the issues of today. If law firms take a relevant, collective responsibility to create an environment where today's generation of talented associates flourish, the rise of female talent will start to take care of itself. For me this is an effective and sustainable way to nurture not only female talent but create an environment that female talent will flourish within.

Lloyds Banking Group

By global trade lawyer **Evelien Visser**

One of the keys to successful D&I initiatives is to have active and visible support from both men and women in senior management. At Lloyds Banking Group, this materialises in many ways. Last year, our CEO Antonio Horta-Osório announced the group's pledge to add a higher percentage of women to its top tier over the coming years. In addition, he is closely engaged in mentoring senior women who have the potential to reach the group's executive committee. Moreover, including men in women's initiatives enriches the pool of resource, and provides a wider and more representative array of colleagues' ideas, backgrounds and perspectives. In

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turn, this ultimately creates business value by enabling the business we support to innovate and anticipate the needs of our diverse customers. The group's women's network Breakthrough is also lead and supported by both men

and women – allowing for a positive, embracing atmosphere combined with a platform for mutual exchange of views, experiences and solutions found that can be mutually beneficial to both men and women.

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