

# Stand Up and Be Counted: Become a Diversity Principles Signatory

By Michael R. Robinson

**I**t began 50 years ago as a means of ensuring civil rights through affirmative action programs and statutes. But today's movement toward greater diversity is something completely different.

Diversity is now a broad term referring to differences in gender, age, race, disability or condition, sexual orientation, religion or nationality. Relating to the workplace, diversity means that the population in the workplace is not homogeneous. Diversity is important in today's business environment for several reasons, including the ongoing necessity of compliance with anti-discrimination laws, an increasingly multicultural world, and recognition that different perspectives are important.

Inclusion of diverse groups has improved over time, but there is still a long way to go. Statistics from the National Association for Legal Placement show that women, minorities, persons with disabilities, and members of the gay and lesbian community account for much smaller numbers in partner and associate ranks at law firms compared to their corresponding numbers in law school graduating classes.

Why is this important? Although many diversity proponents contend that diversity is important because it is the "right thing to do," or that they must comply with existing statutes, many diversity proponents now talk about diversity in terms of the "business case" or that diversity enhances the bottom line. A Minority Corporate Counsel Association study says, "Law firms that only pay lip service to diversity may pay a stiff economic price. Law firms that do not take diversity seriously are already losing money."

Recently, many legal employers, recognizing that diversity benefits both clients and society, have stepped up visible efforts to recruit and retain diverse attorneys. Law firms are competing on a regional, national AND global level for clients and attorney talent. As technology

## Incentives for Diversity Principles Signatories

- ▶ Certificate of recognition from the LSBA
- ▶ Free CLE registrations to diversity/inclusion roundtable discussions
- ▶ Opportunity to be featured signatory in the "Spotlight" section of the *Bar Briefs*
- ▶ Recognition on the LSBA website
- ▶ Recognition on signage at major LSBA meetings and Diversity Conclaves
- ▶ FREE facilitated diversity/inclusion discussions within their offices (schedule permitting)
- ▶ Recognition in a "Roll Call" of New Signatories in the *Journal* and *Bar Briefs*
- ▶ Chance in raffle for LSBA Annual Meeting or CLE registration

continues to break down geographic and communication barriers, understanding and acceptance of various perspectives, ethnicities and cultures will be more vital. Up-and-coming leaders striving for excellence in this global marketplace must recognize the need to address this issue, incorporate diversity in their definition of success, and continue to work diligently and creatively to include all individuals and perspectives.

In 2008, recognizing the growing need to foster diversity in the legal profession, the Louisiana State Bar Association's (LSBA) Board of Governors and House of Delegates approved a Statement of Diversity Principles. To increase commitment from law firms and LSBA members to these principles, the LSBA instituted a method for firms and members to become signatories to the statement.<sup>1</sup> Along with the recognition signatories receive, there are several other benefits that signatories will enjoy in the coming years.

Many signatories share similar views on the topic.

William H. Hines, managing partner of Jones, Walker, Waechter, Poitevent,

Carrère & Denègre, L.L.P., in New Orleans, said, "The Diversity Principles articulate Jones Walker's values. Being a signatory firm helps guide us in our execution of those values."

Michael A. Patterson, a founding partner of Long Law Firm in Baton Rouge, said, "Diversity amongst our lawyers has broadened our perspective on legal issues for our clients and being a signatory of the Statement of Diversity Principles has made us more competitive with the users of legal services."

W. Michael Adams, president of Blanchard, Walker, O'Quin & Roberts, A P.L.C., in Shreveport, said, "At Blanchard Walker, we believe that a workforce comprised of varied backgrounds and a workplace that appreciates individual differences is better able to serve our clients, the legal profession and our community. We are committed to fostering diversity at our firm and in the legal profession as a whole."

Diversity in the legal profession continues to be an important aspiration and priority for the industry. Federal Bar Association President Fern C. Bomchill said in the May 2012 issue of *Federal Lawyer*: "In today's world, the legal profession must accept and appreciate the differences among people. It is not only the right thing to do, but, in today's world, the workforce that reflects the demographics of the global economy will be stronger and the work product that results from that workforce will be improved."

## FOOTNOTE

1. Many firms, judges and institutions have already become signatories. For information on becoming a signatory, go to: [www.lsba.org/diversity/DiversityPrinciples.asp](http://www.lsba.org/diversity/DiversityPrinciples.asp).

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