

Diversity makes us all stronger, sharper



Margo's Master Plan

By [Margo Wolf O'Donnell](#)

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As Women's History Month is still fresh in our minds, it's the perfect time to reflect on the ever-evolving role of diversity in the business of law.

With more than 25 years of practice as an employment attorney, I have had the opportunity to serve an array of startups and Fortune 500 companies as both a legal and business adviser.

Time and again I have seen that diversity — in backgrounds, identities and experiences — enables management groups and boards of directors to make more nuanced decisions and solve problems in innovative ways. I see that, too, as the co-chair of the labor and employment group at Benesch.

My career has also focused on supporting the success of women in the legal profession.

I currently serve as chair of the National Board of the Coalition of Women's Initiative in Law, an association of more than 100 law firms and companies that develop programming for women attorneys.

I have had the opportunity to start and lead women's initiatives at two international law firms.

With all of these experiences, I have learned that gender diversity in particular is an important factor in building strong corporate teams. Women who have risen to the top of their professions have much to teach us about navigating careers over the long haul. In the last few years we've seen tremendous change.

For example, the number of female general counsel within Fortune 500 companies continues to grow. And with the proposal of SB 76 in the Illinois Senate, which if passed, would set requirements for minimum women's representation on Illinois-based corporate boards. It's likely women will have more opportunities to serve on boards — and wield the influence that comes with such posts.

As women lawyers make these inroads, it is more important than ever for them to come together across different areas of practice to support their collective professional development.

committee creates programming that serves in-house counsel and the businesses they represent, advancing the next generation of leadership.

At a recent B-Sharp event titled The Road to Becoming a General Counsel, more than 60 in-house attorneys learned insider tips from prominent general counsel about how to rise and succeed in the profession.

The general counsel panelists communicated their best practices for managing large groups and how to take calculated risks. They also discussed the intricacies of team-building, a skill that is necessary for all attorneys.

"I don't think there's a one-size-fits-all way," recalled one prominent general counsel. "I do believe in being authentic to yourself and not trying to be other than what you are."

That is excellent advice.

Being mindful of how you can help women succeed in the legal profession, whether at law firms or companies, is a practice that will help all attorneys hone their practices and make better decisions.

Women's History Month reminded us that supporting all of our successes in this profession enables us all to rise and to be better counselors to our clients — something that needs to happen 12 months a year.



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