Programs to Know: LCLD Fellows Program

Banner Witcoff is proud to be a law firm member of the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity (LCLD), an organization of more than 350 law firm leaders dedicated to creating a truly diverse legal profession.

LCLD runs a number of "action programs" designed to help a new and more diverse generation of attorneys ascend to leadership roles in law firms and corporate legal departments. Launched in 2011, LCLD's landmark Fellows Program is a yearlong program that provides attorneys at LCLD member organizations with leadership training and professional and personal development opportunities.

Banner Witcoff attorney Azuka Dike, who chairs the firm's Diversity & Inclusion Committee, participated in the program in 2020. This year, he will serve in a mentor role to Banner Witcoff's Katie Laatsch Fink, who was recently named a 2021 LCLD Fellow.

To highlight the LCLD Fellows program and its deep commitment to increasing diversity in the legal profession, we asked Azuka a few questions about his experiences as a Fellow.

Q: How did you and Banner Witcoff become involved in this program?

A: As a firm, we heard about LCLD from a number of in-house counsel and private practice attorneys participating in the organization. Personally, several of my close friends from law school have participated in LCLD, and have encouraged me to get involved. I am thankful they did.

Q: What did the LCLD Fellows Program entail?

A: The Fellows program offers a variety of professional and personal development opportunities, including leadership training, relationship building, and networking activities. In February of 2020, I

attended the First Meeting of the 2020 LCLD Fellows in Miami, Fla. During the conference, I met the other Fellows in my class, and we participated in several interactive events and executive coaching session focused on leadership and management skills as well as self-branding. We also participated in several networking sessions throughout the conference to pair in-house counsel with private practice attorneys in similar industries.

After this first conference, the remaining in-person events and LCLD programming scheduled for 2020 were changed to virtual events in view of COVID. I participated in several networking events and "Leadership Luncheons," where I engaged in informal discussions with general counsel of Fortune 500 companies to benefit from their personal experiences and professional development advice. I also attended virtual learning experiences to interact with other Fellowsn as well as key business executives at various U.S. companies.

Q: Can you tell us about a lesson you learned during the program?

A: I think the best lesson I learned during my Fellowship year was that taking a break can be productive. Working long periods of time can be detrimental to your level of engagement with specific tasks. So taking one 15 minute break every hour to completely disengage can boost productivity.

Q: What advice would you give an incoming fellow or attorneys who may be interested in participating in the program?

A: First, take advantage of all the various programming that will be offered throughout your Fellowship year. Second, "Zoom fatigue" is real and may start to creep in as your "virtual" Fellowship year progresses. Nevertheless, try to connect with as many of the other Fellows in your LCLD class as possible and continue to nurture those relationships after the Fellowship ends.

Q: Why are programs like the LCLD Fellows Program important?

A: As lawyers, we serve a vital function in society by representing clients to protect their rights while being guided by basic principles of equity and meaningful access to justice. Yet, historically, the legal profession has been one of the least diverse professions in the nation. Unconscious bias still impacts many aspects of the legal profession, which can have an adverse impact on areas of key decision making within law firms and companies. Over time, this bias can limit the access of diverse attorneys to networking opportunities, decision makers, mentors, and development opportunity through client contacts. The LCLD Fellows program seeks to level the playing field by creating additional networking opportunities for diverse attorneys and to facilitate meaningful discussion on how we can collectively improve diversity, equity, and inclusion within our respective organizations.

In addition to the firm's participation in the LCLD Fellows program, Banner Witcoff recently announced that Eunice Chan and Shambhavi Patel were selected to participate in the 2021 class of LCLD Pathfinders, a program designed to train high-performing, early-career attorneys in career development strategies.

To learn more about LCLD and its programs, visit www.lcldnet.org.

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