

Onwards and upwards?

Marianne M. Trost,
‘The Women
Lawyers Coach’,
explores the
progress made
in law firm
gender diversity
initiatives in the
past decade.

THE DAWN OF A new year is a good time to reflect on many of the positive changes that have occurred since the start of the millennium.

While compensation, particularly at the partner level, has not achieved parity, the compensation gap between male and female associates has narrowed at the non-equity level¹.

More women are filling positions of leadership at practice group and managing partner levels. The percentage of newer equity partners that are women has also increased². More firms have implemented part-time and flexi-time policies. The Project for Attorney Retention (www.pardc.com), an initiative of the Center for WorkLife Law at UC Hastings College of Law, recently published a study showing that part-time partners generate significant revenues and are active leaders in their firms. And while women continue to struggle to achieve access to business development networks, many firms have now developed women’s initiative programmes on professional development, networking, mentoring and/or business development².

What’s more, the challenges that women of colour face are no longer hidden from the legal community or its clients. Indeed, the American Bar Association Commission on Women in the Profession’s 2008 *Visible Invisibility: Women of Color in Law Firms* study analysed the challenges that women of colour face in private practice. And, in 2009, Catalyst completed the fourth in a series of studies on women of colour in professional services that explored female lawyers of colour’s workplace experience as compared with male lawyers of colour and white female and male lawyers³. The attrition rate of women in their second and third year of law school has also decreased and women continue to graduate from law schools in relatively equal numbers to men⁴. In recent years, female lawyers have also continued to make lateral moves successfully that enhance their careers and equity partnership status¹.

Women have continued to fill in-house counsel positions that have become increasingly significant in charting the waters for future diversity and inclusion in the profession. Firms have been ‘called to action’ through initiatives of the Association of Corporate Counsel (www.acc.com) and individual corporations are starting to demand policies that are supportive of female lawyers⁵. Women also continue to open up and build their own successful practices. A benchmark study conducted by the Minority Corporate Counsel Association in 2009 found that women and minority-owned firms are holding steady despite the worst economic downturn in decades and many are poised for growth⁶. In fact, although there is no shortage of areas in which efforts to promote women in the profession could be focused going forward, the past decade has seen much progress. A substantial amount of research has been carried out that has produced best practices from which we can all benefit. Together we can apply this research to create positive change. [WOMENLEGAL](http://www.womenlegal.com)

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