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ADVANCELAW LAUNCHES LEGAL INDUSTRY DIVERSITY MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Ground-breaking initiative to transform the legal profession by removing the most common impediment to diverse lawyer advancement within law firms: access to client decision-makers.

Arlington, VA, February 25, 2019—AdvanceLaw (www.advancelaw.com), a collective of 250 general counsel that shares performance data to identify and retain star lawyers, announced it is launching a diversity mentorship program to build relationships between rising diverse law firm associates and chief legal officers and other senior in-house counsel.

Working with law firms to identify client service-oriented diverse associates in the mid-level and senior ranks, AdvanceLaw will match these lawyers with senior in-house mentors for career coaching, professional support, and even building pipelines of business through these relationships.

AdvanceLaw has been working on this ground-breaking initiative with several of its GCs since June, to design the program for maximum impact. “We saw the recent open letter to firms signed by 170 GCs and the timing was a happy coincidence,” notes Firoz Dattu, AdvanceLaw’s Chairman. “The mentorship program is a tangible way to create opportunities for diverse lawyers at firms; it’s our way of driving impact across a large swath of the profession.”

Laura Stein, Executive Vice President - General Counsel & Corporate Affairs for The Clorox Company, and one of AdvanceLaw’s early advisors, adds, “I know it was always important to Firoz that the law firms vetted by AdvanceLaw and retained by the GCs have a genuine commitment to diversity. With GCs working in partnership with law firms, this mentorship program is a logical extension of that ethos and a very practical way to drive diversity.”

A.B. Cruz III, former General Counsel of USAA, Emergent BioSolutions, and Scripps Networks, and current Chair of the Minority Corporate Counsel Association, notes, “As a long-time member of AdvanceLaw while GC at various companies, I am delighted AdvanceLaw is using its deep relations with GCs to kick off a major, industry-wide, diversity mentorship program. It will go a long way toward effecting change. This kind of solutions-oriented program can move the dial both in-house and at law firms.”

“Given my commitment to diversity, I really like the open letter from 170 GCs,” notes Verona Dorch, Executive Vice President and Chief Legal Officer of Fortune 500 company, Peabody.

“That said, post-letter, the question remains: what specifically can GCs and law firms do to address this industry-wide problem? That is why I’m excited that AdvanceLaw is kicking off this diversity mentorship program. It’s a way to help diverse associates reach the partnership ranks, and reflects a genuine commitment by large company GCs and major law firms to support the career and business growth of diverse lawyers.”

Likewise, Wanji Walcott, Senior Vice President and General Counsel of PayPal, views the mentorship program as an example of how to take action on the concerns expressed in the open letter. “We continue to see a lack of diversity in the legal industry. To help move the needle and create a stronger pipeline of diverse outside counsel with the potential to progress to the partnership ranks, programs like AdvanceLaw’s diversity initiative include opportunities for senior in-house counsel to mentor diverse law firm talent so they can gain necessary business-client skills from established in-house leaders.”

Notably, AdvanceLaw’s GC Thought Leaders Experiment – which kicked off with an open letter by 25 of its GCs (from Panasonic, Mastercard, Molson Coors, Petco, Keurig, DXC, PayPal, Sony, and others) – will soon examine the impact of diversity. To date, the Experiment has collected over a million data points across hundreds of law firms and thousands of matters to determine which factors and behaviors most impact in-house satisfaction and client-firm relationships. It has found for instance, that flat fees work, lawyer location doesn’t matter, panels tend to demotivate law firms, and many prestigious firms underperform. This growing body of empirical findings can be found here.

Regarding its diversity mentorship program, AdvanceLaw’s discussions with dozens of GCs across the past several months has garnered tremendous excitement, with nearly all companies (including Hershey’s, eBay, Pernod Ricard, PayPal, Peabody, Jones Lang LaSalle, QBE, and British Airways) volunteering to participate.

Mentorship pilots begin next month, and vetted AdvanceLaw firms have already nominated over 300 associates across a wide variety of industry and practice area specialties. “We will then roll out the program across the wider AdvanceLaw group, and perhaps even beyond,” Dattu reports. “For example, not all 170 GCs who signed that letter work with AdvanceLaw, but we don’t see any reason they can’t be a part of this program, too.”

About AdvanceLaw:

AdvanceLaw is a collective of GCs at 250 major companies (including Nike, Honeywell, Clorox, McDonald’s, Mastercard, Panasonic, Unilever, DXC, and Google), sharing counsel performance feedback to retain the best lawyers at firms across the globe. Organized in 2009, AdvanceLaw selects firms based on innovation, quality, efficiency, expertise, diversity, and client-service, identifying top lawyers and teams for large legal matters, panels, and portfolios.

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