
A CALL TO ACTION: DIVERSITY IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION

By Rick Palmore*

In 1999, the Chief Legal Officers of about 500 major corporations signed a document entitled *Diversity in the Workplace—A Statement of Principle*. The Statement evidenced the commitment of the signatory corporations to diversity in the legal profession. In particular, it was intended to be a mandate for law firms to make immediate and sustained improvement in this area. Unfortunately, however, all objective assessments show that the collective efforts and gains of law firms in diversity have reached a disappointing plateau.

As Chief Legal Officers, we hereby reaffirm our commitment to diversity in the legal profession. Our action is based on the need to enhance opportunity in the legal profession and our recognition that the legal and business interests of our clients require legal representation that reflects the diversity of our employees, customers and the communities where we do business. In furtherance of this renewed commitment, this is intended to be a call to action for the profession generally and in particular for our law departments and for the law firms with which our companies do business.

In an effort to realize a truly diverse profession and to promote diversity in law firms, we commit to taking action consistent with the referenced Statement. To that end, in addition to our abiding commitment to diversity in our own departments, we pledge that we will make decisions regarding which law firms represent our companies based in significant part on the diversity performance of the firms. We intend to look for opportunities for firms we regularly use which positively distinguish themselves in this area. We further intend to end or limit our relationships with firms whose performance consistently evidences a lack of meaningful interest in being diverse.

* Rick Palmore is the Chief Legal Officer of Sara Lee Corp., and a member of the Board of Directors of the Association of Corporate Counsel (ACCA). This piece appeared on ACCA's website in October 2004. Approximately ninety general counsel have signed on to date; the list can be found at www.clocalltoaction.com. The referenced Statement of Principle can be also be found on ACCA's website, though the signatory list is dated at 1999.

