

Just Add Women



by Liz O'Donnell (Boston)

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“One of the things I’m worried about is the impact of the economy on women’s initiatives,” says Carol Frohlinger, Esq. Frohlinger is the cofounder of Negotiating Women Inc. and co-author of “Her Place at the Table: A Woman’s Guide to Negotiating Five Key Challenges to Leadership Success.” [Negotiating Women](#) provides negotiation and leadership training for women at every stage of their career.

As budgets are slashed at law firms nationwide, the fate of many employee programs, including women’s resource groups and initiatives, are uncertain. “Law firms, in particular, are fragile,” says Frohlinger. That’s because most women’s initiatives have only recently been started at legal firms. To help firms maintain the momentum of nascent initiatives, Negotiating Women, Inc. is launching the “Just Add Women® Meeting Toolkit Series”. This prepackaged program offers a solution for law firms and affinity groups that are committed to implementing professional development programs for women lawyers but can’t afford the time and money to create their own in this economy.

The Just Add Women® Toolkit comes with ready-made meeting agendas, facilitator’s guides, PowerPoint presentations, meeting checklists and even sample email invitation describing the sessions. Topics include building a strategic network, positioning yourself for high visibility assignments, building client relationships and getting the resources you need. Negotiating Women, Inc. offers complimentary facilitator

training for staff and organization members as part of the Just Add Women® Meeting Toolkit Series too. “I think people need to understand that support for this is critical,” says Frohlinger. “Women are crying out for substantive content.”

Betiayn Tursi, of Tursi Law Marketing Management and Co-Chair of the Women In Law Empowerment Forum (WILEF), which runs leadership programs for women in law, understands Frohlinger’s concern. “All of these women’s initiatives are being put on a back burner. And clearly now is the time to focus on professional development.” Tursi makes the case that cuts in professional development affect women lawyers more so than men because “women were short-shrifted for the longest time.”

[Data from the National Association of Women Lawyers](#) (NAWL) supports her claim. According to NAWL’s 2007 National Survey on Retention and Promotion of Women in Law Firms , men hold 92 percent of managing partner positions, 85 percent of the seats on firm governing committees, and 84 percent of equity partnership in the largest firms in the U.S. This, despite the fact that women have been graduating from law schools in equal numbers as men for the past 25 years.

Jennifer Edgeworth is a partner with Hermes Sargent Bates (HSB), a Dallas-based litigation firm, and is actively involved in the women’s initiative group there. HSB’s group is open to all attorneys, both male and female. Forty-five percent of the firm’s 50 attorneys are women. Edgeworth says the Just Add Women ®Toolkit is intriguing because the kinds of programs it offers can be cost prohibitive for a firm the size of HSB. “Certainly the economy has affected how we analyze what kinds of programs we’re going to do,” says Edgeworth. However, she says the firm has not scaled back its programs. “We’re still doing programs but we’re more deliberate in the analysis of what value you see from it.”

Regarding value, Tursi says law firms that view women’s initiatives as an expense are short-sighted and that firms should take a three year approach to these programs when looking at the return on investment. “The problem,” she says, “is there is no instant gratification.” Tursi also believes there is no one-size-fits-all development program for both men and women. “I wouldn’t put a course on mentoring for boys and girls in the same room,” she says. “That goes for leadership too.” Tursi argues that men find mentors more easily than women in a field like law. This is most likely attributed to the much higher percentage of male partners than female partners in firms.

Edgeworth agrees that men and women approach things like mentoring, leadership and marketing differently. “A hunting outing is not going to be appealing to different women’s groups,” she says. Therefore, HSB offers other client development opportunities besides hunting and golf. The women’s initiative group has sponsored a variety of programs including Holiday Nails and Cocktails, where participants received spa services, and fundraising events for non-profit organizations.

According to Tursi, it's the business development activities that will most help woman lawyers. "Women's initiatives need to focus on business development and leadership," says Tursi, "Period. Full stop