

Q&A with LCLD's Lori Lorenzo: Engage Leadership to Improve Diversity & Inclusion

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[The Leadership Council on Legal Diversity](#) (LCLD) is an organization made up of more than 250 corporate chief legal officers and law firm managing partners, who are working to build a more open and diverse legal profession. The LCLD aims to make a tangible difference in the lives of talented individuals by promoting inclusiveness in legal institutions and society, with the ultimate goal of building a more open and diverse legal profession.

Lori Lorenzo, LCLD's Program Director recently spoke with Thomson Reuters' *Transforming Women's Leadership in the Law* (TWLL) initiative about the actions the organization is taking to further its goals and what helpful actions individuals can take within their legal departments or law firms.

TWLL: *Could you tell us about the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity and its signature programs?*

Lori Lorenzo: LCLD approaches diversity and inclusion from two angles: First, we work directly with law firm managing partners and Fortune 500 general counsel to develop our strategy for addressing the issues that are most pressing. We require the direct investment of these key stakeholders because we know that a work culture that values diversity and inclusion as a business imperative can only be created where the highest levels of leadership are intimately invested.

Second, we've developed a *Talent to Leaders Trajectory* of leadership development training that focuses on diverse lawyers within our member organizations and diverse law students across the country. These programs are designed to equip participants to take on leadership roles within their organizations.

And we've seen great success in our programs. After experiencing the LCLD Fellows Program, for example, our Fellows show no signs of social isolation, a condition that negatively affects women and lawyers of color, according to the [After the JD study by the American Bar Foundation](#). Our 1L Scholars also see higher-than-average post-graduate employment rates.

TWLL: *What structural barriers are the LCLD programs addressing within the legal industry?*

Lori Lorenzo: The biggest structural barrier we are tackling is the issue of social isolation. Women and lawyers of color have historically felt isolated in the legal workplace; and LCLD's biggest success is the immense network of diverse lawyers that has been created through its programs. These lawyers, bonded by shared experiences in the workplace and in their LCLD program, have come together to impact their workplaces, communities, and more importantly, each other's career trajectories.

Lori Lorenzo, Program Director for the LCLD

Our programs are designed so that each is connected to the others. In this way, law students and junior lawyers get the benefit of the wisdom and advice of more senior lawyers, while senior lawyers get the benefit of the wisdom and advice of general counsel and managing partner members. These connections and the exposure that comes with participating in one of LCLD's programs also work to combat implicit bias, which is relatively unconscious, prejudiced judgment and behavior that usually has a negative impact on minority groups.

Finally, we're also tackling the issue of data collection and reporting and working to empower our members to look more critically at diversity metrics and engage in more active conversations with their colleagues about the importance of diversity and inclusion.

TWLL: *On the law firm side, the number of diverse attorneys in leadership has stagnated. Why is that, from your perspective? And what is LCLD's role in driving a solution to that problem?*

Lori Lorenzo: The legal profession is experiencing change; and, although we aren't as far along in diversity and inclusion work as we'd like to be, LCLD is focused on the opportunities that the change will provide. One such opportunity is to position diverse talent to take on positions of leadership. Also, we have the opportunity to empower law firm and in-house leaders to build more diverse and inclusive workplaces.

We don't see stagnation in LCLD's membership. In fact, we continue to see investment and enthusiasm among our members and we remain hopeful that our work, when mixed with the energy of our membership, will produce tangible results to ultimately lead to a more diverse profession.

TWLL: *Who are some of the most well-known alumni? And what are the most impactful results they have had on their organizations?*

Lori Lorenzo: We have a robust community of LCLD Fellows Alumni. Many have gone on to take on some of the highest positions of leadership in the legal profession. Since 2011, when the inaugural LCLD Fellows Program cycle began, 16 Fellows Alumni have become general counsel, 13 have ascended to leadership positions in their firms, seven have become principals of their own law firms, four have become judges, and one has become a presidential appointee.

One of our most well-known Fellows Alumni is Valeria Chapa-Garza, Latin America Vice President and General Counsel at Honeywell. She has started a non-profit organization in Mexico that focuses on the issues that women lawyers face in the Mexican legal market. Her work is largely modeled after the work LCLD does, and we are proud to support her in those efforts.

More generally, our Fellows Alumni have worked diligently to have a positive impact on their respective organizations through leadership roles, and have given back in abundance to LCLD by contributing to programming for junior lawyers and law students. The Fellows Alumni participation in other LCLD programs, in turn, supports the greater LCLD *Talent to Leaders Trajectory*.

TWLL: *What is one action every general counsel, managing partner and practice leader should take to increase diversity within the law?*

Lori Lorenzo: I recently saw [Equal Justice Initiative Founder] [Bryan Stevenson](#) present his work with wrongfully-accused death row inmates. My answer to this question is an adaptation of Stevenson’s call to action, because I believe these things are required in any circumstance in which we want to see change that favors the disadvantaged.

After experiencing the LCLD Fellows Program, for example, our Fellows show no signs of social isolation, a condition that negatively affects women and lawyers of color.

First, be proximate to the issues. Spend time understanding the experiences of diverse lawyers, their families and their concerns. Listen intently to the stories of those who have had a different experience than you have.

Second, be uncomfortable. Put yourself in situations where you are challenging the *status quo*. Don’t be complicit or even neutral in conversations around diversity. Understand the ways in which your circumstances have created favorable outcomes for you, and then be open and honest about those circumstances. Always use whatever political and social capital you have to bring these issues to the forefront of the conversation.

Finally, be hopeful. I often hear people talk about “diversity fatigue” and the challenge of working so hard for very little, if any, gain. However, if you are focused on individuals, you will see that the work has, in fact, produced great success in the lives of individual lawyers and law students. There is cause for hope, and hope is the fuel on which this work continues to be driven forward.

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Transforming Women's Leadership was created by Thomson Reuters Legal and the Legal Executive Institute to address structural barriers and creating cultural change needed at the organizational level for women to succeed and advance in the legal industry.

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