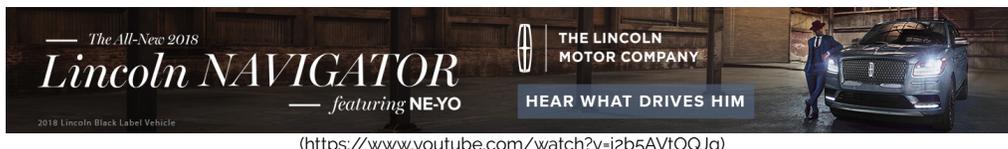


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2

Article Written By: Robert J. Grey

In April 2008, Rick Palmore, Chief Legal Officer of General Mills, brought together dozens of legal heavy hitters for a closed-door meeting in Scottsdale, Arizona. His name for the conference went straight to the point: the Call to Action Summit.

The "action" he proposed was really an intervention, meant to inspire a new approach to the underperformance of the American legal profession on matters of diversity and inclusion. Palmore called on his audience—the managing partners of major U.S. law firms and the general counsel of Fortune 500 companies—to work on this challenge together.

By fostering honest dialogue and collaborative solutions, Palmore sought to move beyond the rhetoric and finger-pointing that derailed many past attempts to address these issues. Without such collaboration—and the personal commitment of top leadership—he was convinced that the American legal profession would continue to lag behind others in advancing women and minorities.

"I'd been to so many conferences over the years about the lack of diversity in the legal profession, and nothing ever seemed to change," Palmore later said. "I just decided to do something about it." Those who attended the summit were a diverse group of leaders with a host of competing agendas. But they were united by their commitment to changing the status quo, and inspired by

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Palmore's example. By the end of the conference, they had formed a new organization, the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity, to tackle the diversity issue together. Not by talking it to death or obfuscating, but by taking collaborative action to correct it.

Nearly a decade later, LCLD has come a long way towards realizing the vision of our founders. Our membership roster has soared, from 125 to more than 300 corporations and law firms, with participation rates topping 95 percent. And at each member organization, we've engaged with dozens of individuals, including diversity professionals and legal operations staff, to help advance the cause.

Along the way, LCLD has spent a lot of time grooming legal talent, with some of the biggest names in corporate America teaming with leaders of major law firms to build one of the premier talent development programs in the country.

In 2011, LCLD launched the flagship Fellows program, designed to bring new levels of professional development to diverse attorneys with eight to 15 years of working experience, preparing them for leadership roles within their organizations. After graduating from the one-year program, the 2011 Fellows formed an Alumni organization that has grown larger and more active as the Fellows program has matured.

Later that year, we also initiated a nation-wide program to mentor thousands of diverse law students each year, along with a 1L Scholars summer internship program that helps hundreds of diverse 1Ls acquire valuable professional experience at member organizations, occasionally dividing their summers between partnering Member companies and law firms.

Aware that attrition is high among diverse lawyers early in their careers, we launched the Pathfinder program in 2015 to provide the benefits of camaraderie and professional development to a younger group of attorneys. That program has grown rapidly, and now serves more than a hundred participants every year.

Like the Fellows, Pathfinders report little of the debilitating social isolation that minority and female attorneys exhibited in the landmark "After the JD" surveys conducted by the American Bar Foundation. Pathfinders also followed the Fellows' lead in organizing an alumni program to stay in touch and continue to grow and collaborate.

Setting our sights on a numerical goal set by former LCLD Chair Brad Smith of Microsoft, LCLD is on track to create 10,000 legal role models by the year 2020—an important interim step toward our preferred future, which Smith described as "a legal profession as diverse as the nation we serve."

We've also taken concrete steps to fulfill LCLD's mission at the regional level, by partnering with our Members, Fellows, and Fellows Alumni to host events of intrinsic value to the local legal community. Such events have now been held in Pittsburgh, Chicago, Washington, Columbus, Seattle, and other cities, with more planned in the future.

We've also worked with individual LCLD Members to explore new and innovative approaches to match the changing landscape of the American legal profession.

One of these initiatives, led by Fannie Mae in collaboration with Lockheed Martin and Scripps Network Interactive, is designed to bring together law firm Fellows with corporate general counsel on a regular basis.

Another, led by BASF Corporation, pioneers new methods of data collection and analysis that empower law firms and corporations to collaboratively measure performance against diversity goals.

All of this demonstrates the power of leadership as a driving force for change, and the power of a large and collaborative net- work to manifest that change.

We foresee even greater challenges ahead as LCLD evolves from an organization devoted to developing diverse talent, to one that also explores innovative ways to optimize and empower that talent.



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Having groomed a new and more diverse generation of leaders, it's imperative that we revisit old ways of recruiting, retaining, evaluating, assigning, incentivizing, and rewarding the diverse talent that comes to work in our law firms and legal departments.

Doing so is a win-win for our Members, who are, after all, deeply committed to their own business imperatives as well as the larger mission of LCLD. They succeed by optimizing their diverse talent, while the US legal profession succeeds by becoming more diverse and inclusive. We all win.

Since our founding, LCLD has grown into something larger and more complex than the organization conceived at that first meet- ing in Arizona.

Yet we are still answering Rick Palmore's original Call to Action, by inspiring the leadership of the profession to collaborate, translating our principles into action, and demanding that our efforts produce measurable results.

And our goal has always been simple: To make the American legal profession a reflection of America itself, as diverse as the nation we serve.

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