

Diversity – Law Firms

“Lead By Example” – A Timeless Message

The Editor interviews **Miguel Alexander Pozo**, *Litigation Partner at Lowenstein Sandler PC and editor-in-chief of DiversityIsNatural.com.*

Editor: Could you please tell our readers about your professional experience at Lowenstein?

Pozo: I started my career at Lowenstein in 1996 as a summer associate and have worked my way through the ranks from associate to counsel to partner. Externally, I serve as the Vice President for the Hispanic Bar Association of New Jersey (HBANJ) and the New Jersey Regional President for the Hispanic National Bar Association (HNBA).

Editor: Would you please discuss Lowenstein Sandler’s historical efforts toward achieving greater diversity, and your own role in planning and implementing its current diversity initiatives?

Pozo: The firm was founded in 1961 by Alan V. Lowenstein. Alan Lowenstein was committed to creating a culture where the best and the brightest lawyers could work and practice law. He was also committed to maintaining a workplace made up of people with a diverse set of ideas. He envisioned a firm where lawyers of all backgrounds would feel empowered to exceed their potential. We are the beneficiaries of that vision. Indeed, our Diversity Initiatives Committee grew out of his desire to be proactive regarding issues of diversity, including the recruitment, retention and promotion of women and minorities.

I have been a member of the Diversity Initiatives Committee since joining the firm. I also serve on the firm’s Recruiting Committee and chair the Alumni Initiatives Committee. Additionally, I serve as one of three firm partners charged with administering the firm’s summer associate program. In these various capacities I help to shape the direction of the firm and satisfy my desire to be actively involved in maintaining the firm’s culture.

As a first generation college and law school graduate, I am passionate about creating opportunities for diverse attorneys, and I am committed to making sure that Lowenstein continues to be a leader in creating those opportunities.

Editor: It has been said that recruiting diverse candidates may be easier to achieve than retaining diverse candidates. Please describe your firm’s diversity efforts relating to retention issues?

Pozo: Law firms are unique environments – culturally and otherwise. At Lowenstein, we believe that retaining diverse attorneys begins with providing mentoring opportunities. So one of the challenges I see for the legal profession is how to create meaningful mentor relationships. In my view, an attorney’s success in a particular law firm environment is determined, in part, by whether that attorney has a mentor to help guide his or her development.

Certainly, diverse attorneys must take ownership of their careers. That said, hav-

ing a mentor to direct you to certain opportunities and important cases, to get you client exposure, and to assist you in navigating the political landscape of the law firm, is critical. Given the importance of mentorship, Lowenstein has made a concerted effort to match all of its attorneys, including our diverse attorneys, with mentors. However, in the end, we recognize that you cannot force these relationships. On many levels, mentoring has to occur organically and relationships have to grow on their own.



Miguel Alexander Pozo

Editor: What are some of Lowenstein’s diversity initiatives?

Pozo: One of Lowenstein’s most successful programs is the mock trial program. The purpose of the mock trial program is to expose high school students – usually minority and female students – to the practice of law at an early stage in their development. Providing these students with access to the legal profession not only nurtures and cultivates their interest in the legal process, but also plants the seeds for strong mentor relationships with our lawyers.

Another successful firm initiative is STRIDES®, *Advancing Women in Business* (www.stridesforwomen.com). STRIDES promotes the visibility and leadership of women in business through quality networking events. These events foster the creative exchange of ideas and information.

In 2004, Lowenstein established the “Lowenstein Sandler Scholars Program.” The program opened our first year summer associate ranks to some of the most talented minority and women law students in the greater Tri-State and Northeast regions. The LS Scholars program awards qualified law students a \$10,000 scholarship in his or her first year of law school and a summer associate position at the firm. If the student achieves at least a B-average in his or her second year of law school, the LS Scholar is eligible for a second \$10,000 scholarship and a summer associate position in his or her second year of law school.

Through the LS Scholars program, we have had success in identifying minority law students and recruiting them to the firm. The LS Scholars program has been well received by the law student population and by others in the legal profession.

Editor: Has Lowenstein Sandler had any particular recognition or accomplishments in the area of diversity that you would like to share with our readers?

Pozo: The firm has received several awards over the last few years. As we grow, the challenge is maintaining our unique culture while adapting to our increased size and geographic expansion, so we were quite pleased that *MultiCultural Law* magazine recently named Lowenstein one of the “Top 100 Law Firms for Diversity,” one of the “Top 100

Law Firms for Women,” and one of the “Top 25 Law Firms for Hispanics.”

In addition, we pride ourselves on having a dynamic environment and being a good place to work for both lawyers and non-lawyers. In 2008, *NJ Biz* magazine ranked Lowenstein as one of the “Top 50 Best Places to Work in New Jersey.” We believe this accolade reflects our ongoing commitment to all Lowenstein employees.

Editor: How do your firm’s diversity efforts resonate with your clients? Does Lowenstein Sandler actively partner with or participate in any corporate in-house diversity programs?

Many of Lowenstein’s clients embrace the notion that diverse legal talent is critical to addressing the complex and varied legal problems our clients face. Our clients are paying attention to the gender and ethnic diversity of the attorneys working on their matters, at both the associate and partner levels.

For example, recently one corporate law department encouraged us to spearhead a “brown bag” lunch series designed to provide a platform for women and minority lawyers to demonstrate their legal expertise before in-house lawyers and business leaders. Other clients have also asked us to sponsor “brown bag” lunches and the concept is becoming increasingly more popular. Typically, the clients select the topics they want discussed and we select a panel of gender and ethnically diverse lawyers able to address those topics.

We also are one of several law firms working with a major pharmaceutical company on its first annual diversity summit focusing on retention and promotion of minority and women attorneys at law firms and in corporate legal departments.

Editor: Do you feel that the current economic crisis might have an effect on the creation of new diversity initiatives or the success of ongoing diversity efforts?

Pozo: My personal view is that the current economic climate is irrelevant to my firm’s efforts to continue doing what we believe is the right thing. Certainly, one cannot ignore limitations imposed by the economy. Nevertheless, striving to have an intellectually, ethnically and racially diverse environment is an objective that we should consistently aim for.

In fact, just this week we unveiled our latest strategic and forward-thinking diversity initiative – a firm-sponsored website called DiversityIsNatural (www.diversityisnatural.com). DiversityIsNatural will foster the advancement and promotion of women and minorities in law by serving as a resource for the legal profession. In an effort to present best practices and solutions to the diversity question, we are interviewing judges, in-house lawyers, law professors, and other prominent figures in the legal profession across the country to try to capture some of their ideas. We intend to address recruitment, retention, and promotion, as well as gender, racial diversity and many other pertinent topics. We will also focus on mentoring, work-life balance, gender

equality and professional development.

One of the questions we hope to address is: what happens to minority and women attorneys once they join a firm? Why don’t a greater number of these attorneys make it into the partnership ranks? The DiversityIsNatural website will ignite robust discussions aimed at identifying solutions to the issue of diversity. It will take a lot of effort, creativity, and commitment, but Lowenstein intends to continue taking a lead in these efforts.

Editor: What do you think the legal profession has achieved in developing opportunities for minorities and women and what additional efforts do you believe are needed? What do you consider to be the principal barriers to minority presence in the legal profession, and how would you want them to be addressed?

Pozo: Being a minority partner in a major law firm, I view myself as part of the positive changes that have occurred in the legal profession. These changes are attributable to the tireless efforts of many individuals at law firms, institutions, and corporations. Those individuals have made diversity and inclusion a priority. They have devoted time, money and resources to strategically addressing these issues. These pioneers have embraced strategic plans to increase diversity in their respective corporate environments. Still, more has to be done.

In my view, change comes from the top – from the management and leadership of an institution. When law firm leaders decide to make the necessary cultural shift, the effect of that shift eventually begins to trickle down and hopefully permeates the culture of that law firm. The fruit of that labor will eventually manifest itself in hiring decisions and promotion decisions. However, the starting point has to be the conscious decision by management and the leadership of any institution to recognize that it wants to address these issues. Then, the institution or law firm must create and implement tangible strategies with some type of metrics for measuring the success of those initiatives.

With respect to obstacles, one of the most significant obstacles is the lack of mentorship. I can personally attest to the impact that access to mentors has had on my career and professional development. My success at Lowenstein has been due, in part, to the efforts of individuals – some who are now my partners – who gave me the opportunity to try different things and encouraged me to find ways to shine. I have also benefited from many external mentors within and outside of the legal profession.

Lowenstein Sandler is trying to identify and then remove obstacles that inhibit meaningful careers for our lawyers. For instance, work-life balance is a recurring theme for both male and female attorneys. I am proud of the fact that as an institution, we have an open mind when it comes to flexible working arrangements for both men and women. Through various committees, our firm continues to develop ways to address the needs of our lawyers. We certainly do not have all the answers, but we are committed to finding them.

Please email the interviewee at mpoz@lowenstein.com with questions about this article.