

CHICAGO LAWYER®

WOMEN@WORK

Law firms across the country are home to incredible Women's Initiatives that support the career advancement of female attorneys. They promote important dialogue, offer valuable programming and connect female organizations. How powerful would it be if all of those initiatives joined forces? The Coalition of Women's Initiatives in Law achieves exactly that. The coalition is a nonprofit association that brings together women from more than 120 law firms and companies. I talked with three leaders from the coalition — outgoing president Carolyn Blessing, current President Sonya Rosenberg and incoming president Malaika Tyson — to understand its mission and how it can help female lawyers.

How and why was the coalition formed?

CB: The coalition was formed in 2008 as a nonprofit membership association to bring together women in law firms and companies of all sizes across the Chicago area to serve as a true coming together of the various initiatives to promote women in the legal profession. Nicole Auerbach, one of our founders, was leading the Women's Initiative at her firm, and as she conferred with other women in similar positions, she realized that many firms' Women's Initiatives faced similar challenges and issues.

MT: I was first introduced to the coalition as a law student. As a student, it was great for me to see the enthusiastic, engaged and supportive group of women who were members of the coalition. That energy still exists today and keeps the coalition thriving.

What does the coalition do?

CB: The coalition's goal is to promote cooperation, dialogue and networking among women to further their career advancement and professional development and to help fuel the continued growth of female initiatives. The coalition provides programming on topics ranging from legal issues to emotional intelligence to leadership skills to life skills.

Our networking opportunities allow our members to build their personal and professional networks and, importantly, to gain perspectives from women in other firms, companies and points in their careers. And we provide a way for women to credential themselves, both through awards given by the coalition and through efforts the coalition undertakes to nominate women for awards in their respective communities and promote the achievements of our members in our newsletters and social media.

SR: While we have several signature programs and events, what I love about this organization is



WORKING TOGETHER

Coalition of Women's Initiatives in Law promotes dialogue

By **CAMILLE KHODADAD**

the real willingness of its members and leadership to evolve to benefit membership. This flexibility has allowed us to have many exciting programs over the years.

What are the benefits of membership?

CB: A law firm or company that joins the coalition provides access for all their attorneys to the programming, networking and credentialing that the coalition has to offer. We also have individual memberships for corporate and government attorneys so that they are able to join and access the coalition events and resources.

Companies and firms often find this is a fantastic opportunity for their attorneys to receive all of the CLE [Continued Legal Education] needed to fulfill their annual requirements, including all of the specialized ethics CLE. More importantly, though, members are eligible to get more involved in the organization, becoming members and chairs of committees and potentially sitting on the board of the Chicago chapter or the national board. This helps members to grow their networks and become more visible within the coalition and the legal community.

SR: Benefits of membership also vary to fit the individual, unique goals and needs of our female attorneys. Looking at my own involvement, I had joined as a junior associate, but then took a step back for a few years, taking advantage of some easy-to-make, during-the-day programs when I had my two kids. Now that I am able to dedicate more time again, I

have been grateful to have the opportunity to re-engage in the organization's leadership.

MT: The coalition is unique in that not only does it provide professional development opportunities, but programming and resources related to financial and mental health. In my opinion, the coalition is one of the few organizations providing this type of experience for its members.

How can attorneys get involved?

CB: I would encourage any woman who wants to be involved to approach her firm or company about becoming a member of the coalition in Chicago, New York and/or Washington. If a woman is a corporate counsel or government attorney, I would encourage them to become an individual member. Then, it's just a matter of getting involved to the degree that she feels she can — whether it's becoming an active member of a committee, leading a committee, sitting on the board or just coming to events to participate in and grow our community.

You can contact the coalition's Chicago chapter at chicago@thewomenscoalition.com or our administrator Jen Mifflin at jmifflin@managementservices.org. CL

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