

NEWS RELEASES

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New York Law Journal: Law Firms Create New Models for Diversity

Promising Program Yields Higher Retention of Women Lawyers

Husch Blackwell Sanders was featured in the July 31, 2008 edition of the *New York Law Journal* in an article entitled, “Law Firms Create New Models for Diversity.” The piece argues that the firm’s competency-based level system used to evaluate associates is a unique approach to associate development and advancement and can help to stop the nationwide “drain of female talent.” The article stems from an unfortunate fact: women only represent 18 percent of partners in the country’s largest law firms. “Retention and advancement of women remain problematic for many firms,” the article explains.

An *ABA Journal* article, which summarizes the *New York Law Journal* article, explains:

“A law firm that replaced lockstep promotions with a system based on competency has seen the percentage of women lawyers leaving the firm drop below that of men.

“Husch Blackwell Sanders had an average annual attrition of about 30 percent when it had the old lockstep system. Under the new program, attrition dropped to about 14 percent overall and to about 10 percent for women in 2005 and 2006, a diversity consultant says in an article for the *New York Law Journal*.

“[The consultant] points to Husch Blackwell [Sanders]’s competency-based level system used to evaluate associates as a promising program. The system designates three levels for associate development, with 17 skills and performance competencies for each level. Associates are evaluated twice a year.

“Associates know where they stand under the competency system, while under a lockstep system they may get little feedback until they are evaluated for partnership. Partners have an incentive to promote associates’ development so billing rates can be increased.

“Husch Blackwell [Sanders] partner Peter Sloan said the mutual incentive to promote is important. Training, mentoring and coaching are viewed as an ‘investment in developing our associate talent, not an expense,’ he said. ‘Increased associate competency is directly tied to increased firm revenue.’”