

NUMBERS AT WORK

# What Female Attorneys of Color Want

A new study examines what's working—and what's not—for women of color in the legal profession

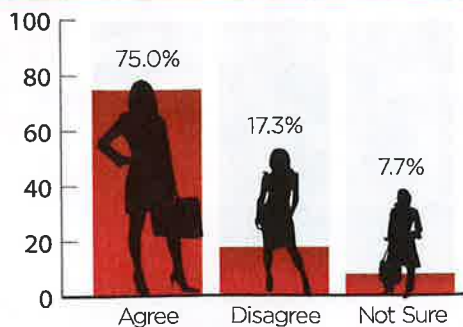
**THE LEGAL PROFESSION CONTINUES TO BE ONE OF THE MOST** challenging industries for black women. Although studies, statistics, and personal testimonies show that female attorneys tend to fare better in corporate legal contexts than in law firm settings, even the corporate environment presents many familiar challenges, such as managing internal politics, finding appropriate and effective mentors, and attaining access to senior-level executives.

In a new study conducted by Corporate Counsel Women of Color ([www.ccwomenofcolor.org](http://www.ccwomenofcolor.org)), a support group for its more than 2,500 members who work for large corporations, these challenges are addressed. Through a Web-based survey and live audience testing at the organization's fifth annual conference, *The Perspective of Women of Color Attorneys in Corporate Legal Departments* reports data from 1,300 female attorneys of color who were asked to reflect on their professional experiences in the workplace—ranging from promotional opportunities and barriers to advancement to comparisons between law firms and corporate settings.

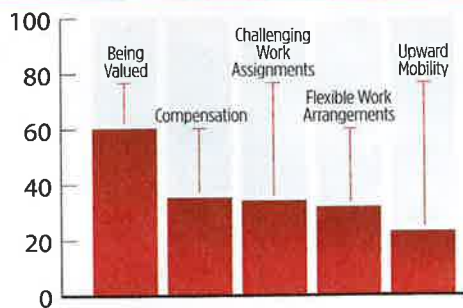
"Past research has focused on the fact that law firms have lost record numbers of women of color attorneys. This report focuses on keeping them at the law firms, maximizing their full potential and slowing attrition rates," says Laurie Robinson, founder and CEO of Corporate Counsel Women of Color. "It is in the corporations' best interests, both from a business case for diversity and human capital aspect, to leverage these women of color attorneys within the corporate structure. Corporations do not have to guess how to do it—our report crisply enumerates how. We want to build a pipeline of women of color at law firms—diverse talent that can work on the legal matters of corporate clients." The report also makes specific recommendations—that corporations establish clearly defined diversity policies; that law firms monitor work quarterly to ensure that employees are developing expertise, skills, and billable hours; and that law schools provide more practical information on the business model of law firms, as well as what it's like to practice as an associate, and how managing billable hours will affect success.

"At the corporate level, legal departments and corporations should use the recommendations to work with their law firms to ensure that

**MY LEGAL DEPARTMENT IS FLAT AND HAS LITTLE ROOM FOR GROWTH**



**THE FACTOR MOST IMPORTANT TO ME IN CURRENT JOB SATISFACTION**



SOURCE: CORPORATE COUNSEL WOMEN OF COLOR

their legal matters are staffed with a diverse team," says Robinson, who is also senior vice president and assistant general counsel at CBS Corp. "Corporations also need to include women of color in succession planning." —Sonia Alleyne

**Participants represented a broad range of characteristics:**

- 64.2% work in publicly traded corporations;
  - 20.2% work in privately held companies;
  - 6.2% are nonprofit employees;
  - 5.2% work for the government.
- Nearly three-quarters are African American; and 58.8% are married.

**Being valued trumps compensation:**  
59.1% said that being valued contributed the most to current job satisfaction; 23.7% said that not feeling valued was the principal reason they quit working for their law firm.

**Women leave law firms for a variety of reasons.**

Aside from not feeling valued, there were multiple reasons why women left their law firms, including not feeling supported (22.1%); lack of mentorship (21.3%); feelings of isolation and seclusion (15.6%); and stereotypes and discrimination (11.4%).

**Corporate legal departments far outrank law firms.**

Respondents reported a greater sense of ownership and of project diversification, and found that the corporate setting provided a more cohesive and inclusive work environment. They also found that training opportunities were greater (53.4%), as was upward mobility (61.6%).

**The following were all considered better in corporate legal departments:**

- 82.7% interfacing with senior management
- 78.2% interfacing and working with clients
- 74.4% the quality of work assignments
- 67.2% the atmosphere of inclusion