

PUBLICATION

Featuring...Christy Tosh Crider: Are Women's Initiatives Really Needed?

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Baker Donelson was just named for the fifth year in a row to FORTUNE magazine's "100 Best Places to Work" – the highest-ranked law firm. I joined Baker Donelson as a 25-year-old new litigator and never once seriously considered practicing law anywhere else. By any measure we have successful women leading our great firm – our number of female attorneys, number of female partners and number of women serving on our governing board beat the national averages. So, the question is: Is "good" good enough? Is comparing ourselves to the national average the right bar, or do we measure ourselves by a higher bar? Baker Donelson didn't become "The Best" by settling for "good."

Baker Donelson is passionate about serving our clients. Clients are best served when the best of the talent pool advances.

But it raises the question, what happens to the 35 percent of the talent pool that we lose between law school and equity partnership? Why are women not making it to our law firm boards in the same percentages as they are making it into our associate ranks? And, most importantly, as law firm leaders, what is our obligation to our firms and our clients to keep those women in the talent pool all the way up to equity partner and leadership positions?

This is a question that must be asked individually by each firm.

This includes those talented women who leave the profession between law school and equity partner. And it's the right thing to do. The law firm of the future will have many roads that lead to success based on the talents of the attorney taking the journey. And, attorney contributions that make us a better firm won't all look alike, yet all will play an important role in making us a great firm, and all will be rewarded.

There is no magic formula to achieve this. It takes hard work, not just on the part of our women rising through the ranks, but also on the part of our leaders who have embraced this mission. We have some exciting things planned for the Baker Donelson Women's Initiative this year. We have 12 new committees of our Women's Initiative, each with a different piece of the plan to accomplish our common mission for 2014. From our first edition of the Women's Initiative Newsletter, which you are kindly taking the time to read, to such topics as Programming, Mentoring, Parental Leave, Pathways to Leadership, BakerReads, Marketing and Retention to name a few. We have four male leaders from within our Firm who have assumed leadership roles in the Women's Initiative, including our CEO who serves on our advisory board and attends all of our meetings. And, our 19 offices have 42 Women's Initiative client events planned for this year, so please join us for one. You will like the women you meet there; they are the current and future leaders of our Firm.

When national averages show that women make up 50 percent of our equity partners, governing bodies, practice group leaders and highest compensated attorneys, then we can revisit this question of whether Women's Initiatives are really needed.