



Personal Effects, Professional Benefits

Why DRI Members Should Attend the Annual Diversity Seminar

By Stacy L. Douglas and Rosary A. Hernandez

Stacy L. Douglas: It is February 2017, and as members of the DRI Diversity and Inclusion Committee, we are working diligently, getting ready for the upcoming Diversity for Success Seminar at the Sofitel Hotel in Chicago on June 15, 2017. During one of our weekly conference calls, we discuss what the committee has meant to us individually and the value that the Diversity for Success Seminar has brought not only to our practices, but also to our personal lives. As we have this discussion, I immediately think of my dear friend, Rosary Hernandez, someone I met through DRI. As my thoughts expand, I realize that while Rosary was my very first DRI relationship, the relationships over time have expanded and affected me personally and professionally in profound ways.

In 2009, I was sent by my then-firm to meet with Rosary at the DRI Diversity for Success Seminar; she was scheduled to interview at the EXPO and was also in the process of transitioning to my firm. I had never attended the seminar before, having only attended the DRI Annual Meeting. I always enjoyed the Annual Meeting, and often attended the Diversity Committee events; however, admittedly, I often felt lost as a young lawyer in the mass of people in attendance.

From the moment that I stepped into the hotel that June 2009, I felt the energy of the seminar, spanning from the conference rooms, to the lobby, all the way to our favorite after-dinner spot, the bar. I immediately felt welcomed, despite not knowing anyone personally at the time. I found a place where people of all backgrounds, races, sexual orientations, ethnicities, and genders shared a common virtue relating to promoting diversity in the legal profession.

Next, Douglas Burrell enters my life, and I have been on the Diversity and Inclusion Committee ever since. Douglas was the chair of the Diversity Committee the first time that we met. During our very first brief conversation, as we passed one another in the hotel lobby, I casually expressed an interest in the Diversity Committee. By the end of that seminar, Douglas had a job for me on the committee's steering committee, and I have been involved ever since. If you have not met Douglas Burrell, I highly recommend making a point of introducing yourself. He solidly represents what DRI and diversity are all about.

By this point, you are reading this column and thinking to yourselves, "I already have friends. Why do I need to be more involved in DRI or attend the Diversity for Success Seminar for friendship?" The reason that DRI is different is the people. The people in the DRI community are like no other. We all have primary, shared collective goals, which are to develop as lawyers, build our books of business, and generate the income to support ourselves and our families. The relationships that I have made in DRI have contributed to all of those objectives. I have lawyer friends from all over the country who are happy to recommend me when a client needs a California lawyer. I have lawyer friends who introduce me to prospective clients in attendance at seminars. I have clients who recommend me to other prospective clients who are DRI members. DRI has provided me with access to people and relationships that I would never have experienced without attending the Diversity for Success Seminar. A mentor of mine many years ago made a comment to me that has really stayed with me over time. He told me that there are tons of great lawyers from which clients may choose. However, clients want to work with the great lawyers with whom they enjoy having relationships. DRI has afforded me the opportunity to expand not only my network, but also my relationships and ultimately my business.

Furthermore, during my tenure as an active DRI member, I had two babies. I took a brief sabbatical from my committee obligations, and when I was ready to get back in the game, there was no judgment—just support and plenty of opportunities available. In addition, during this same time period, I transitioned from a national majority-owned firm to a much smaller female-owned



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firm. I have a much better work-life balance now, and had it not been for my relationships through DRI, I would never have had the courage to make such a big move. The support that I received from my DRI family during these major life transitions gave me the courage to make big moves in both my personal life and career, allowing me to grow and become a better attorney, wife, mother, and friend. Therefore, for me, although DRI has meant a lot personally, the personal effects are what have benefited me the most professionally.

As it relates to me and Rosary, the rest is history. Rosary and I immediately became great friends, partners, and long-lasting colleagues. So while my DRI story starts with Rosary, it has built from her to a community of friends who support me through it all.

Rosary Hernandez: Like Stacy's experience, my involvement with the DRI Diversity and

Inclusion Committee has been impactful to both my personal and professional life. On a professional level, my involvement with DRI's diversity initiatives has opened numerous leadership and speaking opportunities. From the moment that I became involved in DRI's diversity initiatives, the opportunities for me professionally have been consistent. Each seminar that I have attended has introduced me to more individuals, which has evolved into more opportunities on a consistent basis. I have been fortunate enough to be on the steering committee for the DRI Annual Meeting over the last two years, and I have also co-chaired the DRI Construction Law Seminar. Currently, I have the honor of serving as the vice chair of the DRI Diversity and Inclusion Committee.

As a daughter of immigrants, it is important for me to mention that the opportuni-

ties that have been presented to me through DRI are a reflection of DRI's honest and sincere commitment to diversity in the legal profession. In today's world, where diversity is a hot topic, there are many organizations representing that they have a diversity commitment, but not necessarily implementing or having a true commitment or plan in place. DRI is not that organization. It is inspiring to attend the Diversity for Success Seminar and see people from all backgrounds working together toward a common goal.

In closing, in addition to providing tremendous networking and business opportunities, I have made lifelong connections and created lasting personal and business relationships. I consider Stacy among my dearest friends and colleagues. DRI and our involvement in it have profoundly enriched us.

