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Workplace Diversity: Promoting The Gibbons Brand Through The Gibbons Women's Initiative

*Gibbons P.C. is committed to bold thought leadership in connection with corporate diversity programs, including those dedicated to the advancement of women in the workplace. Recently, the firm has expanded its efforts to raise the profiles and promote the practices of its women attorneys and, in so doing, to highlight throughout the legal and business communities various best practices to address women's workplace challenges and opportunities. To achieve these goals, Gibbons has (1) implemented an innovative, award-winning training program focused on advancing the firm's attorneys to the next stage of their careers; (2) formed strategic partnerships with leading women's organizations that share a similar mission to advance women in the workplace; and (3) employed numerous efforts to extend the firm's brand through its Women's Initiative. In this article, **Patrick C. Dunican Jr.**, Chairman and Managing Director of Gibbons, discusses the ways in which the Gibbons Women's Initiative has helped the firm's women attorneys to expand their visibility, to advance their legal careers and to establish deeper relationships with the firm's clients, as well as within the legal marketplace and broader community.*

Editor: Describe your firm's leadership training program.

Dunican: Law schools teach students how to think like lawyers and to become effective legal practitioners. They do not, however, train students in the "soft" skills that are becoming increasingly necessary to build and manage a successful legal career.

To provide these skills to attorneys at all levels, Gibbons launched the **Gibbons Leadership Academy (GLA)**. The broad GLA curriculum begins by teaching the fundamentals of business development: setting realistic goals and developing action

plans to achieve these goals; understanding the firm's administration and the resources and support that is available; learning about the firm's clients so as to build stronger relationships; networking internally to learn more about the firm's practices; and building credibility by delivering presentations, writing articles, participating in association activities, or taking on community service roles. Additional GLA programs build on these initial courses to help attorneys as they move through the various stages of their careers. The business development lessons taught at the individual attorney level are applied to programs designed for current and potential future leaders of defined teams or internal organizations, including client service teams, practice groups, and executive and administrative committees.

Editor: How have you adapted GLA programs specifically for women participants?

Dunican: GLA administrators work closely with the **Gibbons Women's Initiative (GWI)** to design custom courses specifically geared to women, which take into account the distinct time and other constraints women attorneys face. GLA partners with GWI for programs that explore and promote women's unique leadership styles. One recent GLA/GWI co-production, **Creating Your Personal Business Development Plan**, was developed in conjunction with an external training consultant who has a particular niche working with women professionals. The program introduced the concrete, custom-



**Patrick C.
Dunican Jr.**

izable action steps that women attorneys should take to develop business and otherwise advance their careers, presented in the context of client definitions of value and service. **Creating Your Personal Business Development Plan** was a multi-session course, with extensive personal preparation assigned to each participant, along with hands-on instruction, role playing and implementation assistance.

Topics covered included building a personal brand and legal practice; uncovering cross-marketing opportunities; identifying strong prospects to pursue; developing a referral network; identifying organizations that will benefit your practice; and differentiating yourself in the legal market. Next, one-on-one meetings were scheduled for each attorney to meet with a leading business coach to discuss the plan and create strategies to implement it effectively. All of the firm's women directors and counsel participated in this program.

Editor: Does Gibbons encourage its women attorneys to achieve leadership positions in the broader legal and business communities?

Dunican: It is very important to us that our women attorneys in particular represent the Gibbons brand throughout the legal and business communities. The Gibbons Women's Initiative facilitates this effort by partnering with external women's organizations that share our commitment to women's workplace advancement, in order to combine formidable resources to make a real, sustainable difference. As mentioned, Gibbons is recognized as a thought leader in the diversity arena, and our collaborations with other esteemed organizations add credibility to initiatives aimed at increasing women's representation at the highest executive levels in business and the professions.

Please email the interviewee at pdunican@gibbonslaw.com with questions about this interview.

For example, we have been active with the **New Jersey Council on Gender Parity** since its inception, helping to create national and statewide programs and research projects addressing gender equity issues in various professions, including successful fundraising for one of the largest regional studies of women lawyers in the country. The Council's 2009 report provided a review of the current state of the legal profession for women, insight into how women lawyers perceived their careers and futures, and best practices to help firms retain women lawyers. Additional professional women's organizations with which the Gibbons Women's Initiative has recently been involved include:

- **The National Association of Women Lawyers (NAWL) and the NAWL Foundation:** Gibbons attorneys are exceptionally active with NAWL, the leading national voluntary organization devoted to the interests of women lawyers, women's legal rights, and the unique concerns of women in the legal profession. Firm directors have served on the Executive Board of NAWL and as chairs of various committees, and have won the organization's Virginia S. Mueller Outstanding Member Award. Gibbons regularly sponsors NAWL events, including legal educational seminars and webinars that our attorneys plan and at which they present, and we partner with NAWL on charitable and community outreach projects.

Several Gibbons attorneys have co-chaired NAWL's annual meeting program committee, helping to shape the comprehensive agenda for the organization's yearly gathering, and several others have given well-received presentations at these events. Specific presentations we have helped develop include "The Pipeline to Equity Partnership: The Skills, Strategies, and Stumbling Blocks Senior Women Lawyers Encounter on Their Path to Reach Equity Status" and "Getting to Win/Win: Strategies for Employers to Overcome Unconscious Bias and Empower the Success of Women Attorneys."

The NAWL Foundation is NAWL's charitable and educational arm; GWI members

are also active with the Foundation, with one firm director serving as its president for the 2013-2014 term. Our attorneys have served on the board of this organization and have been instrumental in fundraising and securing law firm sponsors for NAWL, as well as getting critical community service projects off the ground.

- **The New Jersey Women Lawyers Association (NJWLA):** NJWLA is engaged in statewide efforts to support and promote its members to high-level positions in law firms, government, academia, corporations and the judiciary; to foster leadership development through professional activities, mentoring, educational programs and networking functions; and to retain women in the legal profession. Numerous Gibbons attorneys are members of NJWLA, with several serving key executive functions for the organization, particularly on its Programming Committee, which guides the organization's annual portfolio of events. Our attorneys have also won NJWLA's esteemed Women's Initiative & Leaders in Law Platinum Award, in recognition of their commitment to the development of the legal profession and sustained contributions to addressing gender equity challenges.

- **Diversity & Flexibility Alliance:** Gibbons is a member of this national organization, which is dedicated to advancing women lawyers and improving work/life balance for all lawyers, and participates in its benchmarking surveys and assessments designed to highlight challenges and opportunities. GWI members have served on panels at the organization's annual meetings, covering such topics as "Innovative Ways to Implement Flexibility" and "Best Practices for Creating, Supporting, and Being a Successful Part-Time Partner," and have been awarded the organization's "Flex Success" honor, recognizing law firm attorneys and their in-house clients who successfully partner to make workplace flexibility a reality in law firms.

- **New Jersey State Bar Association (NJSBA):** A GWI member was recently elected at-large trustee of the NJSBA, a position designated for a woman by the

NJSBA bylaws and board of trustees to advocate for the women lawyers of the state and work to increase the involvement of women in the organization. Our attorneys have also been active in the NJSBA's Women in the Profession Section.

Editor: What have been the business advantages of your commitment to the advancement of your firm's women attorneys?

Duncan: Just in terms of business development, the educational and networking opportunities alone have more than justified our investment in custom GLA training, GWI programming and partnerships with external women's organizations. Our multi-pronged strategy to promote our women attorneys is closely integrated with the firm's overall business strategy by helping women attorneys to establish, maintain and expand close relationships with one another, the clients they serve, colleagues throughout the professions who can refer business, and potential clients in the strategically defined demographic. Additionally, our approach leads to stronger, more comprehensively informed and more innovative business solutions for clients by supporting and advancing a diverse attorney workforce that leverages a variety of perspectives and competencies and that reflects the employee composition at our client and target client companies.

More fundamentally, our commitment to the Gibbons Women's Initiative gives us a fresh way to define our firm and our identity in the marketplace. GWI aligns not necessarily with our core services as a law firm, but with our core values as a proud corporate citizen, and it helps us connect to the personal well-being of, and more directly engage with, our attorneys, clients and broader community. Such connection and engagement strengthen not only our corporate reputation but our brand reputation. Put simply, Gibbons has chosen to define itself in part through the Gibbons Women's Initiative; that is, GWI is one of the main reasons Gibbons is the firm that it is.