

# If You Are Not in DRI's Women in the Law Committee, You May Be Missing Out

By John C. Trimble

**E**xperts on the subject of bar association management will tell you that lawyers join and remain members of a bar association for a handful of reasons. Among the top reasons are networking, business development, education, skills training, speaking opportunities, writing, leadership involvement, and commitment to profession. DRI has a committee that is fulfilling *all* of those needs and more. It is the Women in the Law Committee.

In my role as a leader of the DRI Law Practice Management Committee, I realized that I should join the Women in the Law Committee (WITL) so that I could gain insight into issues that affect women who practice as defense lawyers. I was naïve enough to believe that I had a pretty good understanding of the issues faced by my female colleagues, but after a short time as a member of WITL, I came to realize that I had not even scratched the surface.

## Who Should Join?

Are you a woman engaged in defense practice, a partner of a woman in defense practice, the managing partner of a law firm or business with female defense lawyers, or the practice group leader of a practice group with women on your team? Are you someone who cares about seeing all lawyers thrive, achieve, succeed, and love the law? If you are, then I hope that you will take the time to read this brief article and that you will take to heart what I have to say.

I am not writing this article today to encourage men to join the Women in the Law Committee (even though men are

welcome). I do, however, encourage my male defense lawyer friends to join if they are managing law firms with women in defense practice or mentoring women in defense practice. Moreover, I am here to urge all DRI members and DRI firms to encourage their women attorneys to join the Women in the Law Committee. I further urge your women colleagues to not only join, but to also be active in the com-

of topics unique to women in the law. They announce opportunities for committee participation, and they recognize one another for accomplishments, promotions, and community service.

## Networking at DRI Meetings and Seminars

The committee has undertaken to organize WITL networking receptions at many of the DRI seminars and meetings throughout the year. These receptions have allowed seminar attendees to make new friends, build relationships, and find added value to participating in these seminars.

## Referrals

One of the really nice benefits of WITL participation is the opportunity to make and receive referrals. Through the e-community, hardly a week goes by that WITL members are not seeking names for referrals in locations around the U.S. Almost every request for a referral suggestion is met immediately with multiple referral recommendations.



## Rainmaking Advice

In 2014, WITL published its guide to rainmaking for women attorneys, *Women Rainmakers: Roadmap to Success*. The guide is an outstanding compilation of rainmaking tips that is uniquely tailored to the rainmaking opportunities available to women. Furthermore, each week in the WITL e-community, there is a rainmaking tip available for e-community members. The tips are always practical suggestions for ways that WITL members can enhance their business through thoughtful rainmaking activities.

## The WITL Seminar

I could write a whole article about the WITL Seminar. My law firm has been a sponsor for several years, and we always send a group of four to six women from **WITL**, continued on page 9

mittee. The benefits of belonging and being active are simply too significant to miss.

## Benefits of WITL Membership

The benefits of WITL membership are too numerous to discuss in detail. However, a few of them stand out.

## The WITL e-community

The committee has a vibrant and active e-community. Members share articles relevant to issues facing women in defense practice. Participants raise interesting questions and get answers to a wide array



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to appoint referees to conduct voter registration in jurisdictions that engaged in voting discrimination against racial minorities.

Although a step in the right direction, legal standards made it difficult for the federal government to prove discrimination. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 provided some voting rights protections that created a rebuttable presumption of literacy in persons with a sixth-grade education. Recognizing these limitations, President Johnson is said to have directed Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach to draft “the goddamndest, toughest voting rights act that you can.” By this time many civil rights organizations began pushing for federal action to protect the voting rights of racial minorities leading up to the nationally publicized walk to Selma, Alabama, following the killing of a young unarmed African-American protester, Jimmie Lee Jackson, who was shot while protecting his mother. On March 7, 1965, known as “Bloody Sunday,” protestors marched to Selma, where they were stopped by state and county police who shot tear gas and trampled protestors.

The public’s outrage at the sight of these events further pressured President Johnson to demand that legislators enact expansive voting rights legislation, resulting in the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

### Still Fighting for Our Voting Rights

Despite the horrific journey to the adoption of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, in 2013 the Supreme Court of the United States in *Shelby County v. Holder*, 570 U.S.\_\_\_\_, 133 S. Ct. 2612 (2013), opened the door to the 1800s by immobilizing Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act’s preclearance requirement. Specifically, the Court in *Shelby* held Section 4 unconstitutional and effectively immobilized and disarmed the Section 5 preclearance provision that up until June 25, 2013, had required federal preclearance of changes to election laws for select jurisdictions.

50 years later, many civil rights organizations are still on the Voting Rights battleground.

General Counsel and President of Latino Justice PRLDF Juan Cartagena shared his thoughts on the significance of Voting Rights Act and where we need to go from here:

During the past two decades the issue of securing voting as a fundamental right, not a privilege, has been of paramount importance. In *Bush v. Gore*, the Supreme Court alluded to the operation of the Electoral College and the historical fact that in other times legislatures, not the popular vote, determined who would win a State’s electoral college votes. This was done in the context of a national election where state law, specifically Florida’s, would be the determining factor. The Supreme Court’s allusion to a lack of a constitutional foundation for the popular vote being dispositive led to efforts to either amend the U.S. Constitution to establish it or to gain commitments, state-by-state, to cast Electoral College votes for the popular vote winner. All of this announced the current wave of hyper-partisanship in all matters affecting the vote and its integrity. As States were led by partisan motives they began wave after wave of voter suppression—all in the name of voter integrity, and all in an effort of pursuing the false notion that voter fraud is somehow more pervasive today than ever. That is pure, unadulterated partisan fantasy. But it’s the country’s marginalized voters who are paying the price. For them, voting is a privilege, not a right. For the rest of us we stand to lose the benefit of a real, vibrant democracy.

We need to restore some semblance of Section 5’s protections under the Voting Rights Act such that Congress must address the *Shelby County* case. We need to place a higher burden on voter suppression tactics that are now supported by social science data. We need to remove felon disfranchisement barriers to the vote. We need to seriously question the validity of the Electoral College. We need to establish voting as a right, not a privilege, so as to recapture our place as a vibrant democracy among all other countries.

I invite you to join us June 11–12, 2015, at DRI’s 10th Annual Diversity Seminar in Chicago for our discussion on the anniversaries of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, the historical journey, their significance then and now, and our responsibilities as advocates of the law. **FD**

**WITL**, from page 6

our firm. The seminar has grown each year, and it is a truly splendid mix of substantive legal training and discussion of the practice of law from the point of view of women. This year, for example, there were subjects such as “Cyber Security and Ethics 101 for Corporate Legal Departments and Law Firms,” “Overcome the Confidence Gap and Maximize Your Career Potential,” and “It Takes Two to Tango: Ethical Considerations in Helping Your Clients Preserve the Attorney/Client Privilege.” The seminar included multiple networking receptions, a first time attendees breakfast, a leadership breakfast, an awards luncheon, and a networking cruise on the Atlantic Ocean off the shores of Fort Lauderdale.

As someone who has seen my female colleagues return with new referral business and newly found energy, I strongly encourage every law firm and law department to send its women to the WITL seminar each year.

### Liaisons

Every committee of DRI is supposed to have liaisons with other committees. WITL has done a masterful job of identifying members to serve as liaisons to other committees. My Law Practice Management Committee has multiple WITL liaisons who have been very active and energetic members of my committee. Further, WITL has found and appointed liaisons to most if not all of the other substantive committees of DRI. Being a liaison for WITL to a substantive committee is an excellent opportunity to meet the leadership of a committee and to be thrust into an active role within DRI.

### In Conclusion

There is no cost for DRI members to join the committees of DRI. Getting started is as simple as going to the DRI website committee page and clicking the link to join a committee. Please consider whether you, your colleagues, and your friends should be members of the DRI Women in the Law Committee. If you are looking for an opportunity to have genuine and meaningful participation in DRI, the Women in the Law Committee has it all. There is no downside to joining, and I sure hope that you will give it a try. **FD**