

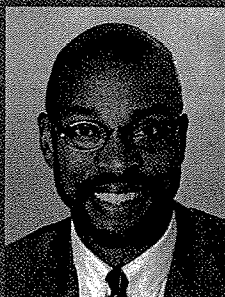
Managing Outside Your Comfort Zone

By Lloyd M. Johnson, Jr.

Throughout 2005, five leading attorneys shared their thoughts about mentoring with Lloyd M. Johnson, Jr., the founder of the Minority Corporate Counsel Association, and publisher emeritus of *Diversity & the Bar*® magazine. This is the last article that will be written this year on the topic of mentoring across differences—spotlighting how lawyers of different racial, gender, and cultural backgrounds build successful mentoring relationships. We thank everyone who shared their thoughts and experiences with our readers, who undoubtedly gained insight about mentoring best practices as a result of the information provided in this column throughout the year.

Past issues of *Diversity & the Bar*®, including the full series of articles on mentoring published during 2005, are available online at <http://www.mcca.com/site/data/magazine/archives/index.shtml>.

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Lloyd M. Johnson, Jr.

When seeking career advice, it is natural to reach out to people with whom you are most comfortable. However, operating within those limited confines may very well truncate the trajectory of your career.

That lesson is one of many that some of the most successful in-house attorneys have learned. Throughout 2005, this column has focused on Mentoring Across Differences, and how to build successful mentoring relationships among lawyers of different races, gender, and cultural backgrounds. Five extraordinary in-house lawyers have offered their views on mentoring for *Diversity & the Bar*® readers. This group has included one Hispanic American man who is a litigation specialist; one African American man who is a corporate securities specialist; an African American woman litigator; one Asian American woman whose expertise is intellectual property litigation; and one Asian American man, an intellectual property specialist.

As they have explained, some of their most helpful mentors came from completely different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. And they have also shared other thoughts and insights about

obtaining the most out of a mentoring relationship, including the following five keys to effective mentoring:

1) Informal Mentoring Relationships Can Be More Effective than Formal Ones

Isabella Fu, senior attorney at Microsoft Corporation, has found throughout her career that her informal mentors were far more helpful than the ones who had been formally assigned. For Fu, abstract discussions about career development with attorneys not even necessarily in her practice area were not nearly as useful as working with and studying the styles of attorneys she worked side-by-side with on projects.

"I never gained as much from my assigned mentors," she says. "I worked with many different attorneys and tried to learn from their styles, but not emulate any one person directly."

So although there is value to be derived from a formal mentoring relationship, it's important not to undervalue the importance of informal connections and the relationships that can be cultivated as a result.

2) Don't Underestimate the Power of Strategic Observation

J. P. Suarez, who was recently named senior vice president of loss prevention and risk control of Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., says he owes much of his career success to the transparency of his mentors, including Christie Todd Whitman, former governor of New Jersey and former administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency. When Suarez worked for Whitman in state government and at the federal level, she invited him to sit in on meetings and interact with her on a regular basis. "I think some of the best learning takes place by observing," says Suarez, who was previously vice president and general counsel for Wal-Mart Stores' SAM's Club Division before his promotion—proof that he knows how to take his own advice about furthering his career.

3) Technical Competence is Essential, But Political Acuity is Imperative

Technical ability alone is not enough to move you up in the ranks of an organization. A lawyer also has to act like a decent person and be able to blow his or her own horn without seeming arrogant. "Doing outstanding work should be a given," says Ivan K. Fong, chief legal officer of the Vendor Financial Services unit of GE Commercial Finance. "That's your entry ticket, and it's what people assume you are doing if you want to advance your career. But style matters, too, whether we acknowledge it or not."

