

Diversity Awards

Sheila Mikhail - Individual Role Model



Triangle Business Journal

Company: Life Sciences Law

Title: Managing Member

Age: 46

Company description: Life Sciences Law is a law firm in the Research Triangle focused exclusively on the needs of biotechnology, pharmaceutical, medical devices, bioinformatics and genomics companies. We bring a combination of legal and business experience in industry, technology and intellectual property matters.

Birthplace: Illinois

Family members: Husband, Michael; daughter, Megan.

Education: University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign, B.S. with highest honors; University of Chicago, MBA with honors; Northwestern University, J.D. with honors

Describe what makes you a successful leader when it comes to diversity in the workplace:

I founded LSL after I learned that I made substantially less than male attorneys that I was supervising at a large law firm. LSL is a pure meritocracy. Because we have an encompassing and dynamic environment, we have been able to hire exceptional people who would have otherwise been shunned by or felt uncomfortable working with other firms with less-inclusive environments.

How did you contribute to your organization's diversity mission?

First, by being a good role model. Second, by giving women and minority attorneys opportunities that they would not otherwise have. That means not just hiring them, but also developing them by giving them challenging assignments with a high level of client contact and demanding high standards.

Give us an idea of some of the biggest accomplishments by you or your company in the past year in the field of diversity.

LSL continues to seek, hire, and develop a diverse set of professionals. My family has sponsored several scholarships for minority students. I have spoken at several events focused on inspiring students with disadvantaged backgrounds. I

participate in a mentoring program and I'm a mentor to a minority undergraduate student.

What does the Triangle need to do to have a vibrant atmosphere for a thriving diverse work force across all sectors?

Triangle-based companies should be more inclusive. In the legal market, the local people of influence tend to limit economic opportunities to a small circle of insiders, many of whom continue to be white men. We have found it easier to attract new clients from San Francisco, New York, and Boston (even though we are competing with much larger and more established law firms in those markets). Those markets support a culture more accepting of people with diverse backgrounds and new influences. These areas have realized that innovation and economic growth can be realized from diverse backgrounds, which bring different perspectives. Economic growth occurs best when opportunity is spread around and people are able to compete on their abilities versus the color of their skin, gender or origin.