

### Taylor's Perspective ...

## An Enlightening Webinar Will Show a Way toward Needed Change

Like many other sectors in the nation and around the world, the legal profession stands in the midst of the turbulence and instability triggered by the convergence of the pandemic, the imminent recession, perhaps depression, and the widespread justifiable societal outrage over racism that's embodied in police brutality. And, we may still be a long way from finding the path out of this triptych of turmoil.

But the legal profession also stands at a transformational precipice. The question is: Will law firms fully realize that opportunities for positive change have surfaced and will they then take action?

Debbie Epstein Henry—a highly regarded consultant and principal of DEH Consultants, author, speaker, and a force for change within the profession for more than 20 years—continues to do more than her part to help navigate law firm leaders, lawyers, and others in the industry into a new and better landscape. A longtime advocate for women and minorities in the field of law, Epstein Henry has organized what may (and should) be a pivotal webinar, scheduled for July 21, entitled “Women Disrupting Legal in Disruptive Times.” It's the latest event in her two-decades-long, quarterly DEH Speaker Series.

“We are indeed in volatile times and these times require powerful, decisive, and disruptive leaders,” reads the invitation to the webinar. It goes on to describe the event as

a “thought-provoking, interactive discussion that will explore developing the gravitas and communication skills to be bold and effective leaders in uncharted territory.”

Readers of this column likely know that I have been a strong supporter of law firms hiring and promoting more women and minorities. It's the right thing to do, and it's the smart thing to do. And while we've seen some small steps over the years in diversifying the profession, we've fallen far short. We desperately need more women and minorities in positions of power across all economic and political sectors. We also need more consciousness-raising and inspiring events like what “Women Disrupting Legal in Disruptive Times” will surely offer later this month.

### Lack of Diversity Failed IMF

When talking about the times we're in and the impetus for the webinar—and other efforts by Epstein Henry and her colleagues—she points to the Great Recession of 2008 and subsequent years. Shortly before Lehman Brothers imploded, of course, one of the most critical events that unleashed the economic collapse, the International Monetary Fund issued a statement, Epstein Henry recounts. “The head economist for IMF essentially said ‘We're going to weather this financial storm and all will be well.’ Well, a week later the world fell apart,” she says.

Once the dust settled the IMF had an independent evaluation committee look into what the organization did when it made that horribly erroneous prediction. The committee wanted to know how the Fund could have completely missed the mark. How could it have been so blindsided? The committee's finding: It was a classic and disastrous case of group think.

The majority of the 15 or so people on the IMF team who monitored the financial footing of the global economy and issued the don't-worry, there's-nothing-to-see-here statement were simply too much alike. They were almost all white men who attended the same universities and participated in the same professional and social networks. The few diverse members of the team presented dissenting opinions but they were completely dismissed and overruled.

"To me" Epstein Henry says, "this really speaks to the issue of diversity of thought and how important that is, particularly when people are really struggling and there's total upheaval. If you don't bring in people with different perspectives you can completely miss something huge, as was the case there."

### *'Piloting New Ideas'*

We're living in another critical time, one that's even more calamitous than the one a decade ago, where a perfect and tumultuous storm has thrust us into the unknown, and we need inventive thinking and creative solutions. We don't need conventional, same-old, same-old approaches to the world-changing crises we face. And while the legal profession is by no means encountering an existential threat to its survival, we all see many problems that need fixing, not the least of which is the lack of diversity within law firm leadership positions.

"There really has been minimal movement in terms of female representation in leadership ranks," Epstein Henry says, citing the work of the National Association of Women

Lawyers and other groups that track hiring and promotion trends.

The conditions of the world—and the legal profession—right now are ripe for transforming, if not completely overhauling business and human resource models. "We have this window," Epstein Henry says, "where there may be more receptivity to doing things differently because we're seeing examples of success in New Zealand, Germany, Taiwan, and Finland [which have been praised for the way they handled the COVID-19 outbreak], which are lead by women, and because the status quo is so problematic right now that there's more of an appetite for piloting new ideas."

Indeed, and it's time we truly open up—in all corners of our society—and let many more women and minorities take the lead in making decisions that affect their nations, states, cities, companies, organizations, and yes, their law firms.

The invitation for "Women Disrupting Legal in Disruptive Times" provides more information about what the webinar will offer: "At this event, a distinguished panel of women leaders will share how they have become influencers in the legal profession. Whether it's a CEO of a tech-enabled NewLaw model, a leading M&A/Corporate partner from a cutting-edge large law firm, a CEO innovator driving diversity change, or a GC from a dynamic in-house legal department, these leaders are all change agents in their organizations and beyond. During this webcast, you will learn what gives these women the confidence and courage to lead big."

I sincerely believe that's just what we need and, knowing what I know about Epstein Henry's past endeavors, I'm confident participants will come away with greater insight and fresh ideas they can apply to their own lives. To register for the webinar, go to <https://www.debbieepsteinhenry.com/speaker-series/>. ■

—Steven T. Taylor