

Leadership is Top Priority among AHLA Women Members

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The AHLA Women's Leadership Council (WLC) has been hard at work identifying opportunities to address professional development issues and concerns of interest to female members and others. In an effort to hone in on the most pertinent topics, in early October the WLC prepared and disseminated an Association-wide survey to identify the top three categories of women's issues that the WLC should focus on in upcoming events. The categories were generated by the WLC based on their personal experience and the experience of working with other women-focused legal groups. The categories offered to survey participants were: self-advocacy, compensation negotiation, leadership, equality in the workplace, empowerment, communication, and impression management. One hundred eighty-two members responded to the survey, ranking **leadership, executive presence, and self-advocacy** as the topics of greatest interest. Using these survey results, the Council will identify speakers and programming that focus on these three main topics. Most of the upcoming AHLA programs will feature a WLC-coordinated panel devoted to issues of importance to the female membership and, specifically, the topics that were identified in the survey. Recently, at the Fraud and Compliance Forum in Baltimore, MD, a WLC breakfast panel was hosted where the focus was creating a successful speaking proposal. Similar interactive panel discussions are planned for the Legal Issues Affecting Academic Medical Centers and Other Teaching Institutions program, Physicians and Hospitals Law Institute, Long Term Care and the Law program, Institute on Medicare and Medicaid Payment Issues, and the Annual Meeting. Likewise, the first Women's Leadership Institute is planned for April in Nashville, which will encompass a full day of programming – for both men and women – focused on hard skills and practical tools to address issues of diversity, recruitment and retention, and development of professional skills and pathways. While each of these topics is somewhat intertwined with the other, WLC will endeavor to break each one down by identifying specific subtopics that relate to the primary subject matter. For example, with respect to executive presence, WLC will identify female leaders in the community who have successfully navigated a variety of C-suite environments, both successfully and unsuccessfully. Presentations will be focused on effective communication mechanisms, the symbolism of authority, and presentation – all of which have a significant impact on another relevant topic, which is leadership. As we know,

women leaders come in all shapes and sizes, but one of the similarities you see in many well-known women leaders is their ability to work together at the table to make the best decision for the organization through collaboration. Women who are able to cross the aisle and navigate different personalities and approaches will naturally excel in their communities, workplaces, and at home. Building each other up and creating a network of women is a building block to success. WLC will identify thought leaders in this space and bring them to the table for interactive and honest discussions with the membership on unlocking the key to meaningful female participation in the board room. The concepts of self- and other-advocacy are useful as a means of understanding the different contexts in which women can effectively and comfortably exert influence when making requests. However, boasting accomplishments may cause women, more frequently than men, to experience uncomfortable situations, which in turn may lead to lower motivation. This situation begs the question: Is negotiation a skill for which men are simply better socialized than women? WLC will attempt, through its programming, to bunk this notion by refocusing the conversation on the importance of building self-confidence and effective negotiation techniques. In addition to identifying the key topics of interest for female membership, the survey sought to gather information on other pertinent topics for female members. For example, one question asked participants to identify the obstacles they have encountered in the workplace. More than 50% of respondents identified “lack of mentoring,” and another large percentage felt that “gender discrimination” was a significant obstacle. Studies have repeatedly shown that women have reported a more difficult time finding mentors than men do, which makes the fact that survey participants were consistent in identifying mentoring and peer advocacy as tangible ways for women to help other women advance professionally not surprising. WLC will use these issues in the dialogue and seek to identify ways to encourage women-to-women mentoring through AHLA and the importance of active participation and follow-through in such relationships. WLC is committed to identifying and focusing on those topics that are most relevant to our membership. We thank those of you who participated in the survey and provided your feedback – it was invaluable as we work to create a consistent theme in our content delivery over the next few months. If you have additional ideas or thoughts, please don’t hesitate to share them with a member of WLC. We look forward to seeing you at upcoming events. Copyright 2015, American Health Lawyers Association, Washington, DC. Reprint permission granted.

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