

Gender Imbalance in the Legal Profession of Hong Kong

香港法律界男女不均

In the Issue of August 2018 of Hong Kong Lawyer (香港律師會會刊), our first lady President of the Law Society of Hong Kong Miss Melissa Pang (彭韻僖會長) said the following:

“For the legal profession, a striking diversity deficiency is gender imbalance. The proportion of women varies at different stages of the career path in a law firm. Women made up about 59% of trainee solicitors, 60% of assistant solicitors, 36% of consultants and 28% of partners (as of 20 July 2018). While more than half of the new entrants to the profession are female, only about one quarter at the senior level are female.

It has been argued that it is a conscious choice on the part of the women lawyers that they do not progress to leadership positions. However, is it indeed a conscious choice on their part or is it the result of an unconscious bias embedded in a firm’s process of decision making on matters like allocation of work and job promotion that lead to the loss of women talent at the top? That is a question for the decision makers to reflect on.

Whatever the cause, the hard fact is that a substantial proportion of female solicitors are dropping out along the way. If this trend of talent loss continues, the profession will have difficulty sustaining its growth in the long term, having regard to the trend that the majority of the new entrants are likely to be female in the foreseeable future.

A diverse workforce needs to be supported by an inclusive work environment. Inclusion allows staff to feel respected and valued and they are likely to stay with the employer longer leading to improved staff retention. This in turn saves costs in recruiting and training replacement staff, maintains productivity, and minimizes disruption to clients.”

Miss Pang’s observations are interesting. We wonder if gender imbalance is also an issue for other professions such as doctors and accountants?

香港律師會彭韻禧會長說：「在法律界，一個顯著的缺陷是性別失衡。女性佔律師行人員的比例在不同事業階段各有不同。實習律師的女性比例約為 59%、助理律師為 60%、顧問為 36%、合夥人為 28%(截至 2018 年 7 月 20 日)。雖然有超過一半的行業新晉是女性，但高層職位中女性只佔約四分之一。

有人認為，女性律師自己選擇不晉升領導崗位。這真的是他們的選擇，還是由於律師行在工作分配和職業晉升等決策過程中不自覺地帶有偏見，導致女性人才流失？這是決策者需要思考的問題。

不論原因為何，現實是有一大部分女性律師中途退出。若這種人才流失的趨勢持續下去，考慮在可預見的未來，新入行者大多數是女性的趨勢，行業長遠來說將難以持續發展。

多元化的勞動力需要包容的工作環境來支持。包容令員工感到受尊重和重視，因而留任更長時間，從而提高員工的留職率。這相應節省了招聘和培訓替代人員的成本，保持生產力，盡量減少對客戶的干擾。」

會長的意見警醒大家，大家也想知道性別失衡是否也在其他專業例如醫生和會計師等，相同面對？

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