

CONVERSATIONS...CONVERSATIONS



John W. Daniels, Jr.

An Interview with John Daniels, Jr. Chairman of Quarles & Brady, LLP

by Lawrence Hill,
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In 2007, Attorney John W. Daniels, Jr. conquered a major ceiling in the legal profession when he became the first African American to lead a major Wisconsin law firm after he was named the director of Quarles & Brady LLP, a full-service law firm with offices in Wisconsin, Illinois and Arizona. Mr. Daniels boasts stellar academic, professional and civil credentials. He was a former Ford Foundation Fellow who graduated from the Harvard Law School. He has an extensive background in complex commercial real estate transactions and development projects, and has represented clients such as Philip Morris Capital Corporation; the General Electric Capital Corporation; Xerox Corporation, and Kraft Foods. His civic involvement is no less impressive: this past Director of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Milwaukee is currently the Director of the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, which is one of the oldest and largest community foundations in the United States. With a schedule undoubtedly full to bursting, the CCBA News is pleased that Mr. Daniels spent some time with our own Lawrence Hill (CCBA, 2nd Vice President) in August of 2008 in order to discuss his views on diversity in the legal profession, civic involvement, and the continuing importance of the Black bar.

Legal Career

CCBA: Can you briefly describe your background?

Daniels: I was born in Alabama and grew up in Wisconsin. I went to North Central College in Naperville and Harvard Law School. By training I am a real estate lawyer, an interest I developed in law school. I took a course taught by Mortimer Zuckerman in development, and I've always had an appetite for real estate. I have been active in a number of bar associations, primarily with the ABA. I was National Secretary of the Real Estate Section. I have also been National President of the American College of Real Estate Lawyers.

CCBA: How long have you been with Quarles & Brady and what have been your main keys to success in the firm?

Daniels: I have been at Quarles & Brady since 1974. I have been a Partner in the firm since 1981 and have been involved in firm management the last 15 years. I found out early that if you gave the best service to your clients they gravitated to you. I did not approach the practice of law as just a legal technician. I spent a lot of time and effort in understanding the real estate industry. I also did not focus on internal politics, instead I focused on the ways to become valuable to people who hire lawyers.

CCBA: Who was the one person who was the best advocate for you during your legal career?

Daniels: I had many people who helped me who were real estate lawyers and who brought me along as part of the team. I had a lot of support to become successful from the firm. I also believe clients are critical to your success. My focus was always on the clients. I felt that if I could help to make the clients successful I would also become successful.

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CCBA: In what ways do you find membership in bar organizations helpful to your practice?

Daniels: The time spent in bar organizations helps build a network of resources that are helpful. It also provides a platform for speaking and commenting in the field.

Diversity Best Practices

CCBA: What efforts has your firm made to increase the diversity of practicing attorneys?

Daniels: We make an effort to align the people who work for the organization outside of the everyday practice of law and being a lawyer. As an example, last week we had a series of events with all diverse lawyers. We also had a golf event with all lawyers where we raised money for youth organizations. We then held a client event with 300 people including where the play, *The Color Purple* was presented.

CCBA: What are the main challenges in your view to retaining diverse attorneys?

Daniels: The growth of alternative opportunities from minority attorneys. Approximately 70-80% of diverse attorneys leave law firm practice to go someplace else to work.

The Role of the Black Bar

CCBA: In your view what role should the black bar play in serving the needs of the African American community?

Daniels: The Black Bar is critical in advocating issue that are of importance to the communities that minority practitioners see most closely in their practices. The Black Bar is also important in that they help lawyers find their way through the profession. I was at the most recent NBA national convention, and was taken by the number of lawyers there. I was also impressed by the display of services of some of the fine individual lawyers in attendance.

CCBA: One of the emerging ways seen to helping minority youth to gain access to the legal field are so called "pipeline" programs, where youth are identified at an early age and encouraged to proceed on a path to law school. What is your opinion of these types of programs?

Daniels: The business community is ahead of law firms in terms of diversity efforts. I believe that law firms have not been as adept at deciphering where the opportunities have been developing to acquire the best talent. I think law firms should recruit the best talent in the world and give them real opportunities to perform in a way that reflects their differing backgrounds.

CCBA: How can lawyers become more involved in the lives of today's youth?

Daniels: I think the best way to help youth is to either start or get involved with the Boys and Girls Club in your area. I helped start a Boys & Girls Club when we discovered that there were more than 10,000 youth in the area and no facility to serve these youth. When you have people with the skill set that lawyers have they should not underestimate what they are capable of as far as organizing, strategizing and working to achieve results. The more that we show people what is possible the more that people can achieve.