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Kimberly-Clark In-House Counsel Has 'NEW' Idea for Black Women Lawyers

Chasity Henry is founder of The NEW Roundtable, a group with the mission of empowering African-American woman lawyers, enhancing their careers and influencing the wider legal profession.

By **Angela Morris** | Originally published on [Texas Lawyer \(/texaslawyer\)](#) | February 04, 2019

In her day job, Dallas lawyer Chasity Henry works in-house at Kimberly Clark-Corp., but when she's not tending to the global giant's transactions, she's extending her hand to pull other black woman lawyers up the career ladder.

It started when Henry and former law school friends, all black women, began meeting for casual happy hours about eight years ago, discussing their

challenges in the legal profession. It was Henry who pitched the idea of creating an official nonprofit organization—The NEW Roundtable—with the mission of empowering



Chasity Henry.

African-American woman lawyers, enhancing their careers and influencing the wider legal profession to improve hiring, retention and promotion of black women. (NEW stands for Network of Empowered Women.)

“Formal networks aren’t in place, oftentimes, for African-American women,” said Henry, assistant general counsel of corporate affairs and legal strategy at the Irving, Texas-based \$18 billion company with brands like Kleenex, Huggies and Kotex. “We felt we didn’t always have the opportunity to join the other tables, so we created our own.”

In the five years since it was founded in 2014, The NEW Roundtable has grown from 25 to 90 members and become a shining symbol of how networking, mentorship and career development opportunities can launch women-of-color attorneys’ careers into the stratosphere. The model might spread, since The NEW Roundtable has gotten multiple requests from African-American lawyers—both men and women—to allow them to open chapters of the nonprofit in their own cities.

Henry said members come from top firms—like Locke Lord, Baker Botts and Hunton Andrews Kurth—and ultra-large companies like Toyota, AT&T and Deloitte.

(As the nation recognizes Black History Month, it’s important to note that historically, women-of-color lawyers have struggled immensely to advance in the legal profession. Statistics show it’s still true to this day. The National Association for Law Placement released an annual report this year showing that in 2018, minority women continue to be the most underrepresented group among law firm partners.)

Henry’s nonprofit is part of a mini-movement of networking groups that exist to give a leg up to women-of-color attorneys. Some others include The Downtown Group (<https://dtghouston.org/>) in Houston—with more than 300 members—and Barristers Who Brunch (<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/barristers-who-brunch-present-two-year-anniversary-brunch-tickets-48095724607>) in Dallas.

Henry earned her J.D. from the University of Texas School of Law in Austin, and then spent four years as an associate at Vinson & Elkins before going in-house, first at Vizient Inc., then Dr. Pepper Snapple Group, and finally at Kimberly-Clark.

She and about a dozen fellow African-American women who were Texas Law alumni started meeting occasionally between 2011 and 2014, and found they all faced similar challenges in the legal profession. Some struggled to find mentors and saw they weren't afforded the choice work assignments, client contact and business development opportunities that are key to a mid-level lawyer advancing to the top of a firm. In-house attorneys had challenges forming relationships with company executives that are needed for career advancement, Henry said.

She and her peers realized that rather than looking out, they could look within their group for business development, brand building opportunities and help refining their technical skills. In 2014, they formed The NEW Roundtable to formalize the effort.

"She is the one who really conceptualized the organizational framework that we have in place now," said Carter Arnett partner Courtney Barksdale Perez of Dallas, membership chairwoman of The NEW Roundtable. "We've really been able to grow it. That's passion in action."

Perez, a civil litigator, said her membership has led to significant professional success.

"I've had very successful years in terms of originating business, because of the contact and network I've been able to build," she said.

The NEW Roundtable focuses on empowering its members—a mix of private practitioners and in-house counsel—by forming relationships with each other that provide key mentorship opportunities and lead to work referrals. When a member is pushing for partner at her law firm, an in-house attorney from The NEW Roundtable might help by vouching for them and attending the firm's events and parties. Even more important—when an in-house member can usher work to a law-firm member.

Members also help each other gain appointments to serve on other nonprofit organizations' boards, get booked to speak at legal conferences, find outlets to publish their legal articles and win new job opportunities. Finally, The NEW Roundtable has a mission to influence the wider legal profession by partnering with law firms and in-house legal departments to improve hiring, retention and promotion of African-American lawyers.

"Using our influence to help one another, like we set out to do—it's happening," said Henry, noting the group is creating a process of electing a more formal board, to give the nonprofit long-term permanence. "We want this to be something that's around in 50 years and having an impact."

Angela Morris is an Austin-based freelance journalist. Follow her on Twitter @AMorrisReports.

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