

Spotlight on...Debby Cusumano Caldwell, Winston & Strawn's Director of Partner Hiring & Alumni Relations

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In this Spotlight Q&A, Winston & Strawn Director of Partner Hiring & Alumni Relations Debby Cusumano Caldwell shares insights on the firm's Alumni Program.

What is the value of a law firm alumni program? How does it benefit past and current attorneys?

When you join Winston, you join us for life. Our alumni are part of the fabric of our firm, so we created an alumni relations program to continue to build and strengthen our relationships with them. All of our people—whether they practice at Winston for their entire careers or go on to other great opportunities—are part of what makes us a great all-around firm.

Having a robust alumni program fosters connections for our current attorneys, helping them develop business for the firm and increasing the potential for client referrals. Our alumni are some of our greatest ambassadors when it comes to providing feedback about our services, gaining competitive intelligence, strengthening law school relations, and enhancing the Winston brand. They also serve as a valuable resource for recruitment, secondment, and career opportunities.

Maintaining a strong connection with Winston has many benefits for our alumni as well, and can open doors for them throughout their legal careers. We hope our alumni will stay connected to the firm so that we can celebrate their successes and help them achieve more in their careers—wherever their paths lead them. It's great to see alumni gathered at our events and enjoying visiting with each other. We learn from the diversity of their experiences and perspectives.

When did Winston's alumni program launch? How?

The firm has long recognized the importance of our alumni network, but until recently did not have a dedicated person to focus on developing and managing a formal program. Firm management approached me last summer about taking on this role as a part of our new Winston talent strategy, in addition to continuing my responsibilities as Director of Partner Hiring. Having been with the firm for 22+ years, I know many of our alumni and thought this would be a great way for me to continue to support them and to stay in touch more formally.

Once I took on the Alumni Relations role, I started researching and learning about alumni programs at other firms and companies. I also became involved with the NALP (National Association of Law Placement) Alumni Relations Section, a group of peers who focus on alumni relations at their firms and share information and best practices with

each other. Armed with this knowledge, and our experience from the first year of our program, we plan to expand our alumni offerings in future years.

Fuad Akinbiyi serves as Partner Hiring & Alumni Relations Coordinator. He has been instrumental in supporting our developing alumni relations program and is enthusiastic about building a top-notch alumni program at the firm. I also work closely with many members of Winston's talent team, as well as colleagues in our business development, communications, conflicts, and IS departments. I welcome and count on their support to make the alumni program successful.

Tell us about the various alumni initiatives and events.

We created a [dedicated page for alumni on winston.com](#) that highlights our quarterly communication, The Dispatch – Alumni Edition, announcements and recaps of the alumni receptions we hold in many of our local offices, and information about other resources available to our alums. On the professional development side, we offer CLE events and other training opportunities to our alumni, as well as full access to our online library of internally developed CLE programs. Our alumni also are invited to participate (via livestream) in our Diversity Heritage & Awareness Month Programs. We plan to go live with an online job board where clients and alumni can post current job openings. By year's end we hope to roll out an online alumni directory so that our current lawyers and alumni can stay connected.

How can current attorneys get involved/contribute?

Our mission is to keep alumni engaged and excited about Winston. When attorneys leave the firm, we send a welcome e-mail that introduces them to our alumni program and [Winston Alumni LinkedIn Group](#) so that they can stay connected with our current attorneys and fellow alumni, and stay up to date with firm news and events. We have started collecting information from alumni about areas in which they would like to stay involved so that we can ultimately offer targeted alumni opportunities in [pro bono](#), [corporate social responsibility](#), and other areas. We also have asked alumni to speak at associate training events to discuss their career paths.

The way I look at it, becoming an alumni of Winston is the beginning of a new opportunity—one that benefits our former colleague as well as the firm.

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Deborah Cusumano Caldwell

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