

Beyond the Seat: Converting Opportunity into Influence

California Minority Counsel Program

2026 Men of CMCP Summit

Date and time: Wednesday, April 22, 2026 - 2:15 pm - 3:45 pm

Session Title: Beyond the Seat: Converting Opportunity into Influence

Description: This topic focuses on practice strategics for advancement, including promotion pathways, origination credit, sponsorship, and leadership developments. In particular, panelists will discuss their upbringing in their organization, how they got a seat at the table, and how they were able to leverage that seat at the table to where they are now. Panelists will examine how to navigate organizational dynamics, increase visibility and influence, and how to lead authentically while driving institutional success.

Moderator: Andres Michel (Wilson Turner Kosmo)

Panelists:

- Derrick Boston (Golden Arrow Advisors)
- David Martinez (Robins Kaplan)
- Abiel Wong (Chevron)

CA MCLE: 1.25 HRS in General Credit

OUTLINE:

Opening Discussion

- Can you briefly describe your path into your current role or organization?
- What factors or decisions helped you get that initial seat at the table?
- Were there specific people, opportunities, or risks that made a difference early on?
- When you think about your career, can you share a moment you first felt you were in a position of influence or when you didn't?

Follow-up:

- At what point did that shift from simply having access to actually having influence?

- Looking back, what do you think others often misunderstand about how advancement actually happens?

Demystifying the Institution

- In your organization, what distinguishes someone who is present in the room from someone who shapes decisions?
- How did you position yourself to be trusted with greater responsibility and visibility?
- What differentiates attorneys who advance into leadership from those who plateau?
- What specific actions or strategies helped you get to where you are now?

Pathways to Advancement & Leadership

- What are the most important factors for making a partner or joining firm leadership today?
- Reframed: What are the most important—and often unspoken—criteria for promotion and leadership roles?
- How should attorneys think about sponsorship versus mentorship?
- What experiences or signals indicate that someone is ready for leadership in an in-house environment?
- How can attorneys increase their visibility with decision-makers?
- What are effective ways to advocate for yourself in promotion or leadership discussions?
- How do you ensure your contributions are seen and credited? What's one strategic decision that had an outsized impact on your career trajectory?

Business Development & Building Influence

- How important is origination credit in building influence—and how can attorneys position themselves to earn it?
- What separates attorneys who successfully build a book of business?
- What makes outside counsel stand out as trusted advisors versus interchangeable service providers?
- How can attorneys leverage their networks and perspectives to create business opportunities?

Executive Presence

- How can attorneys develop executive presence in a way that feels authentic?
- What are the most common communication mistakes you see attorneys make in high-stakes settings?
- What are some immediate adjustments attorneys can make to sound more confident and authoritative?

Navigating Bias & Staying Authentic

- How do you balance authenticity with the expectations of traditional legal environments?
- What advice would you give for navigating internal politics and decision-making structures?
- When have you had to advocate for yourself or others in a way that carried risk?

RESOURCES AND CITATIONS

This appendix provides research-based materials, leadership frameworks, and practical tools that deepen the concepts discussed in *Beyond the Seat: Converting Opportunity into Influence*. These resources support the program's focus on advancement, influence, sponsorship, business development, and navigating institutional dynamics within the legal profession.

Leadership, Advancement & Influence

Liz Wiseman – *Impact Players: How to Take the Lead, Play Bigger, and Multiply Your Impact*

- A research-driven framework on how high-impact contributors distinguish themselves, take initiative, and earn influence.

Herminia Ibarra – *Act Like a Leader, Think Like a Leader*

- A foundational text on identity shifts, strategic networking, and stepping into leadership before the title arrives.

Sylvia Ann Hewlett – *Executive Presence: The Missing Link Between Merit and Success*

- Practical guidance for developing authentic executive presence in high-stakes environments.

Tsedal Neeley – *Remote Work Revolution*

- Insight into influence, communication, and leadership in hybrid or global organizations.

II. Sponsorship, Mentorship & Organizational Dynamics

Coqual (Center for Talent Innovation) – *The Sponsor Effect*

- The leading research differentiating sponsorship from mentorship and explaining how sponsorship accelerates advancement.

Harvard Business Review – “Why Sponsorship Is Key to Career Advancement”

- Evidence-based analysis of how sponsors use political capital to elevate protégés.

Deloitte – *The Six Signature Traits of Inclusive Leadership*

- Complements discussions on navigating institutional dynamics and building trust.

III. Business Development, Origination Credit & Influence

David H. Freeman – *Secrets of the Rainmaker*

- Practical strategies for building a book of business and becoming indispensable to clients.

Heidi Gardner – *Smart Collaboration*

- Research showing how cross-practice collaboration drives origination credit, influence, and leadership opportunities.

LawVision – Business Development White Papers

- Useful for understanding how attorneys can leverage networks and perspectives to create business opportunities.

IV. Bias, Diversity & Structural Barriers in the Legal Profession

These resources directly support your outline's themes around authenticity, navigating politics, and understanding the structural realities of advancement.

Renee Michele Collins – *Strategies to Increase the Number of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Employees in Senior-Level Positions* (2025)

Research-based strategies for increasing representation in leadership roles.

- <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/18378/>

Hassan Kanu – “‘Exclusionary and classist’: Why the Legal Profession is Getting Whiter” (Reuters, 2021)

A data-driven examination of structural barriers and demographic trends in the legal profession.

- <https://www.reuters.com/legal/legalindustry/exclusionary-classist-why-legal-profession-is-getting-whiter-2021-08-10/>

Kim Mellett – “Forward Momentum: Why Your Firm Needs Black Partners — And How to Find Them” (Reuters, 2024)

Analysis of partnership pipelines and the business case for diverse leadership.

- <https://www.reuters.com/legal/legalindustry/forward-momentum-why-your-firm-needs-black-partners-how-find-them-2024-01-29/>

Tina Shah Paikeday & Jean Lee – “Unleashing the Power of Diversity Through Inclusive Leadership” (Harvard Law School Forum, 2019)

A governance-focused look at inclusive leadership as a driver of organizational performance.

- <https://corpgov.law.harvard.edu/2019/05/20/unleashing-the-power-of-diversity-through-inclusive-leadership/>

Danielle A. Taylor & Nikie L. Gray – *2025 Report on Diversity in U.S. Law Firms* (NALP, 2025)

Comprehensive data on representation, advancement, and attrition across the legal industry.

- <https://www.nalp.org/uploads/2025NALPReportonDiversity.pdf>

Deepa Purushothaman – *The First, The Few, The Only*

- A powerful exploration of navigating leadership as a person of color in traditional institutions.

Minda Harts – *The Memo*

- Tactical guidance on self-advocacy, visibility, and navigating bias.

Stanford SPARQ – “Science of Diversity & Inclusion”

- Behavioral design strategies for reducing structural inequities and understanding institutional dynamics.

V. Legal Profession & Leadership Pipeline Research

McKinsey & Lean In – *Women in the Workplace* (Annual Report)

- Data on sponsorship, leadership pathways, and advancement barriers.

ABA – *Profile of the Legal Profession*

- National data on demographics, advancement, and structural barriers in the legal field.

Corporate Executive Board (CEB) – Leadership Transitions Research

- Insight into how leaders gain influence and credibility after stepping into new roles.

VI. Practical Tools & Frameworks for Attendees

- Sponsorship Readiness Checklist
- Origination Credit Strategy Map
- Influence Mapping Worksheet
- Executive Presence Quick-Adjustments Guide
- Unspoken Criteria for Promotion Framework