

MAKING THE CASE FOR EWI
Presented at the Annual Executive Luncheon
June 10, 2008

I would like to thank Tanya English, who is your current president and the representative for Miller & Martin, for inviting me to be one of the speakers here today at your Executive's Luncheon. I looked at the website and read Kim's bio (Kim White, President of Luken Holdings, Inc.) – I'm going to keep my comments short because I am looking forward to hearing from her.

Several years ago I was a guest at this luncheon and sat where you are -- wondering exactly what this organization was. For those of you who have had your representatives involved in this organization, much of what I have to say today will be old news, but to those of you who are new to this organization and its good work, I hope you will find my comments encouraging. Because you are going to wonder – Is EWI worth it? This is an organization that works and I mean works hard. Your representative's involvement will require her time and her attention. There may be times you will be asked to make accommodations . . . or write a check. And you will wonder is this worth it?

Today I intend to make the case that your firm's involvement in EWI is worth it.

A consultant once said if you want cooperation – show people what's in it for them. So let me try.

On the broadest level, your representative will meet the representatives of other firms. All executives understand the value of networking and the time it takes to develop the network. Your firm's affiliation with this organization adds a whole new group of contacts without taking the executive's time. Tanya has been able to call on this network for information and suggestions on several problems. Just look at the list of member firms and you will realize that the potential of this network is impressive.

From an employee development standpoint, your representative may in many cases be your business alter ego. She manages your workload, schedules, and contacts. The more polished, confident and professional that person becomes, the better the impression you will make on your business contacts.

Let me share my personal experience with this benefit. Tanya is a great paralegal who has been with our firm for 14 years. She came to us - from another firm which is a member - with a strong skills set in real estate financing and development. When she arrived, she was a great follower.

Let me digress on this concept of a "follower." I don't mean to use that term in a negative sense. Every leader knows the value of good followers. Followers are the people you count on to get things done. But there are followers and then there are followers who are leaders. My son explained to me this distinction after a weekend of watching Band of Brothers on the History Channel. We were talking about commissioned officers and then non-commissioned officers - men like the sergeants. The sergeants know the men and are entrusted with the execution of the orders. While non-coms follow orders, they are also managers in their own rights. They maintain morale. They keep the officers informed and most importantly they get the job done. I contend that EWI makes non-coms out of what might otherwise be executive cannon fodder.

Back to Tanya. She clearly saw herself as a bystander to the process, there to be helpful as needed. On numerous occasions she would tell me how much she hated to speak in public and just wanted to

do her job. But it was apparent that she was hiding her talents under a basket. I noted that clients instantly related to her. She was selected time and time again to be on firm committees to plan events or to represent herself and other paralegals when the firm needed input from this group.

In 2003, when the firm's EWI representative left for a maternity leave, Tanya was offered the position. She stepped up and joined this group. Almost immediately she began to network and learn from the other women in this organization - how to not only be of assistance but how to initiate and execute. As vice president she had a wonderful example of commitment and leadership from Nancy Harrison. She saw what it took to lead a group. As time went on the biggest change occurred after she attended the group's Leadership Conference. She came back energized and filled with ideas she wanted to implement for our organization and for my practice group. Her confidence soared. She stepped into her role as an officer with trepidation but she was determined to grow professionally and personally. And she has.

I recently watched her on a trip to a client's property for a public auction. There was no hanging back waiting for instructions. She moved right into what needed to be done, made friends, got the information. She had become a representative of our firm that clients not only liked but had confidence in.

There were no nervous giggles. No flushed face when she was called upon to give an answer. No hesitancy in asking for help when she did not know an answer.

She has also seen how her work in this organization changed the lives of others. She has told me the stories of the women who EWI has helped through its scholarship program. She did her time as a single mom and can relate to the challenges that these young women face. She has also learned the power of collaboration in charitable endeavors. Applying this last point to an organizational level, your firm's association with these good works can only enhance its reputation in this city.

In conclusion – Your firm's involvement in EWI is worth it.

It's worth it to the member firm because this association raises the firm's profile and expanding its contacts.

It's worth it to the executive because it enhances the skills of your assistant.

It's worth it to the individual representative because of the opportunities provided for professional growth and personal satisfaction.

It's worth it to the community because of the examples these women set for other women and the actual educational and professional opportunities their charitable work provides.

To paraphrase Martha Stewart – an executive woman who has experienced her own personal growth opportunities in the past few years, “EWI – It's a good thing.”

Thank you.

Shelley D. Rucker, Bankruptcy & Creditor Rights Attorney
Miller & Martin PLLC