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BOSTON SUNDAY GLOBE NOVEMBER 5, 2006

## Part-timers find room at law firm

### High turnover helps change attitudes on work-life flexibility

#### Balancing Acts

MAGGIE JACKSON

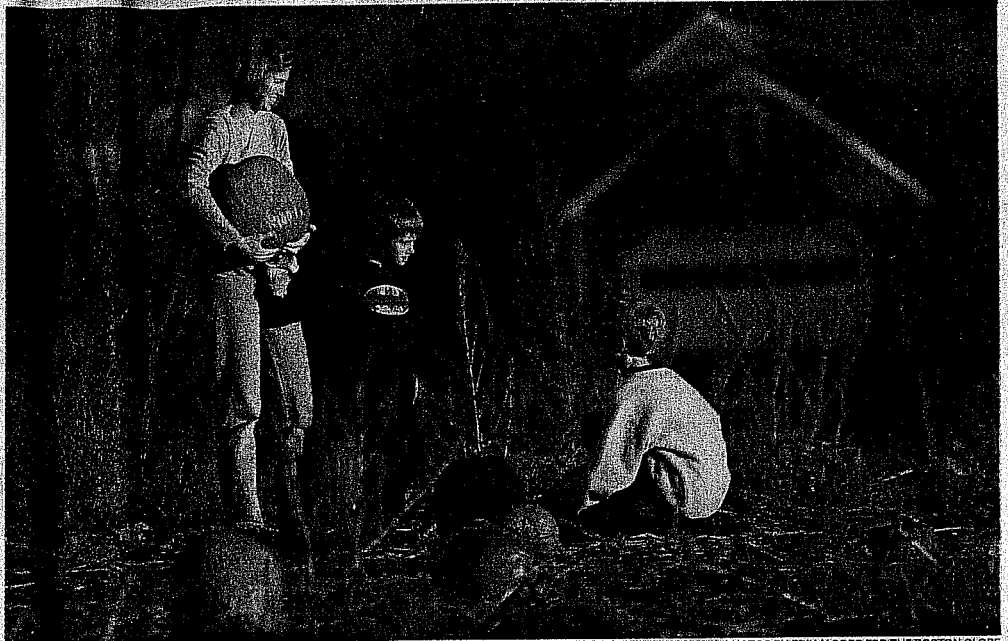
This isn't a story of dramatic victories, the kind you might get with a bang from a judge's gavel. It's a tale of slow, trickling change and the tools you need to hammer out real work-life progress, not empty jargon, in law firms.

Consider the part-time policies that just about all firms have on their books. Almost any lawyer in America will tell you that these policies are often synonymous with derailed careers. And that's why just 4 percent of lawyers work part time, compared with about 14 percent of professionals in engineering, medicine, or architecture, according to the non-profit Association for Legal Career Professionals.

But take a part-time policy, and make it transparent and open to all. Then add an in-house advocate to help people find the right arrangement for their needs, broker the change with management, and monitor its success. Suddenly, flexibility looks real.

This is essentially the model adopted nationwide this year by Kirkpatrick & Lockhart Nicholson Graham, a firm with 1,000 lawyers, with offices in Boston. The firm won't specify, but says that "dozens" of lawyers work reduced hours and that their numbers have risen 40 percent since January.

For partner Irene Friedel, the new program helped persuade her to return in February from 18 months at home with her 11-year-old twins, Jacob and Claire, and 6-year-old son, Adam. Friedel is a pioneer, having made partner at Kirkpatrick & Lockhart in 2000 as a part-timer. But a lack of flexibility, especially to telecommute, drove her to quit



PHOTOS BY ERIK JACOBS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE



Part-time hours and telecommuting help law partner Irene Friedel combine legal work and home life. Left (from left) are her children Jacob Gaposchkin, 11, Adam Gaposchkin, 6, and Claire Gaposchkin, 11, at their Littleton home.

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# High turnover is leading law firms to rethink flexibility

► **BALANCING ACTS**  
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in 2004.

Now she works four days a week, including two at home, a schedule that she worked out with Roslyn Pitts, the firm's balanced hours coordinator, and Freidel finally feels that her own version of balance is doable.

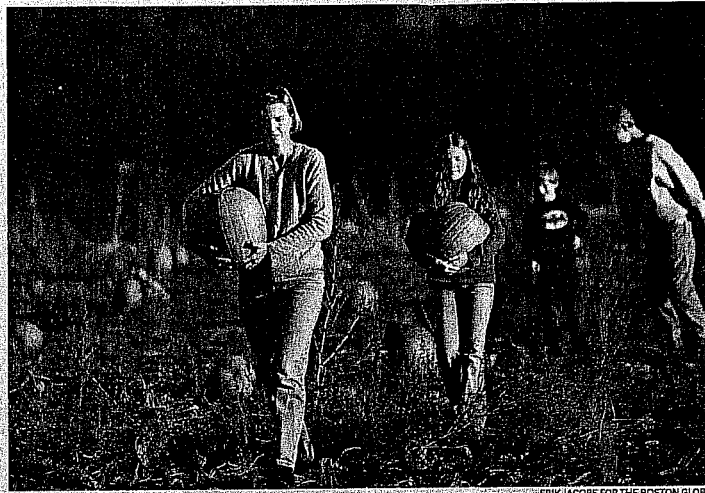
"This program has made the difference in making me feel I could do both — have children and have a career," says Freidel. "It's not easy, but it's possible."

Work-life issues aren't just for women, and yet women have driven progress in this area because until recently, they've been most in need of employer support in their efforts to juggle family and career. At the top, inflexibility spells brain drain. While women have made up 40 percent to 50 percent of law school graduates for two decades, they comprise

just 17 percent of partners at major law firms.

Creative thinking is especially paramount to reshaping the legal profession, which is built on rigid revenue expectations per lawyer. Lawyers at top firms are expected to bill 1,800 hours a year but put in a grueling 2,100 hours or more of actual work. Part-timers are assumed to be bad deals because their overhead costs equal a full-timer's.

But look beyond such narrow measures, and the picture changes, says Joan Williams, a law professor at the University of California/Hastings and author of the balanced hours model adopted by Kirkpatrick & Lockhart and other progressive firms. Attrition is far more costly to firms than overhead, and turnover frustrates clients, says Williams, who argues that successful balanced hours programs benefit everyone.



ERIK JACOBS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Irene Freidel and her children (from left) Claire, 11, Adam, 6, and Jacob Gaposchkin, 11, haul away their pick of pumpkins in preparation for Halloween recently in Littleton.

"If you don't solve the problem, it shows up in terms of women's retention," says Williams. "If you do solve the problem, it benefits men as well as women."

To inspire real reform, you also need people who are willing to

question the system, and there's no better place to nurture change agents than at law schools. That's why Deborah Epstein Henry created the "Cheat Sheet," a list of 75-odd benchmarking questions for students to determine about

firms, such as what percentage of partners work reduced hours.

"I'm trying to think about the pressure points to make change," says Henry, president of Philadelphia-based Flex-Time Lawyers, a consulting and advocacy group.

The guide, released in September, seeks to help women "before the problems begin," as well as give firms a self-measurement tool.

The guide has inspired second-year Columbia Law School student Anne Shutkin to think differently about her future. It helps students see "how a firm fits into that larger picture of work-life balance," said Shutkin, who participated in focus groups during the drafting of the cheat sheet.

Effective change doesn't happen overnight, and almost always, it's powered by group efforts, policies with bite, leadership support, and visionaries, such as Williams and Henry, who keep their eyes on the ball.

"This is not all that complicated," says Lauren Stiller Rikleen, who, as a senior partner with Bowditch & Dewey and author of "Ending the Gauntlet: Removing Barriers to Women's Success in the Law," is a visionary herself. "We're talking about retaining talent through the ability to use flexible scheduling. It just seems, like in the law, there's a tendency to make it more complicated than it needs to be."

Balancing Acts appears every other week. Maggie Jackson can be reached at [maggie.jackson@att.net](mailto:maggie.jackson@att.net).

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