

I WISH I'D KNOWN

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Work/life balance is an issue facing all lawyers during the span of their careers.

Many law students and lawyers make the mistake of thinking that work/life balance is an entitlement mostly sought by women when they have kids. In turn, many employers misperceive work/life balance as a temporary accommodation for working moms. These assumptions are incorrect. As I wish I had known in law school, the only way for work/life balance to work is if it is designed to be a win-win solution for both lawyers and employers during a lawyer's full career lifespan.

So, how does that work? For starters, you have to be indispensable. The more valuable

you are to your employer, the more negotiating power you will have in proposing to work differently. If your work quality is top notch, an employer will be more receptive to developing a creative solution to recruit and/or retain you.

However, the onus is on you to demonstrate how it is economically in your employer's interest to hire or retain you when you are proposing to work less traditionally. You will also need to show that work quality will not be negatively impacted by your work/life balance priorities. This may be a difficult proposal to make at the outset of



your career. So, be patient. It may not be fitting for you to always have your work/life requests met, particularly when you are entering the profession.

When seeking work/life balance, you want to make sure you are realistic. For example, if you set your expectations for flexibility rather than predictability, you will be more satisfied with your arrangement while meeting the demands of a thriving legal practice. Part of being flexible is being responsive and accessible to clients' and colleagues' needs and ensuring that work continues to flow when you are outside the office.

What's also important is for you and your employer to recognize that work/life balance is not just about "part-time" for working moms. Work/life balance is an issue facing all law-

yers during the span of their careers. This broader notion of work/life balance includes: ensuring reasonable hours for all lawyers; protecting lawyers' vacations; supporting parental and other leaves; providing child care and elder care support; offering flexible and reduced hours; implementing successful reentry policies for lawyers getting back to work; and developing phased retirement programs.

As you enter the profession and aspire for an integrated and balanced life as a lawyer, keep these thoughts in mind to ensure that you always deliver high-quality work and service to your colleagues and clients while seeking fulfillment in your life inside and outside the office. ■

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