



Are Lawyers Held Captive by Their Own Practice?

Main Line attorney makes book on argument

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Jewish Exponent Feature

The title of her book is a mouthful, but it also accurately pinpoints attorney Deborah Epstein Henry's concerns with the direction of the legal business and its impact on lawyers' lives outside the office: *Law & Reorder: Legal Industry Solutions for Restructure, Retention, Promotion & Work/Life Balance*.

President of Flex-Time Lawyers LLC, a national consulting firm she founded in the late 1990s, the Philadelphia lawyer truly has experienced the need for restructure and balance: Epstein Henry, 43, is married (for 17 years) with three sons, ages 15, 12 and 9, and has placed value on her family development alongside her commitment to a professional life.



The Main Line resident will discuss that very issue -- balancing both -- Tuesday, Feb. 1, from noon to 1:30 p.m., at 1101 Market St., 11th floor conference center.

The book launch will be generated by an interview of the author by Comcast broadcaster Lynn Doyle, followed by a panel discussion moderated by Doyle, with participants Carol Ann Petren, executive vice president, general counsel and corporate secretary, CIGNA Corporation; JoAnne A. Epps, dean, Temple University Beasley School of Law; Abraham C. Reich, co-chair, Fox Rothschild LLP; and the author.

A former litigation associate at Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler LLP's New York office and Schnader Harrison Segal & Lewis LLP in Philadelphia, Epstein Henry says her Jewish background has provided insights into her analysis of the state of the legal profession and its need to make changes.

There it is, in Chapter 10 of *Law & Reorder*, where she describes how her older sister and father lobbied the Conservative synagogue she grew up attending to "allow girls to perform their Bat Mitzvahs on Saturdays."

Her lobbying paid off: "Ultimately, the board relented, finding that just because something had always been done a certain way was not an adequate basis to continue doing something that way when it no longer could stand up to changing times."

Anti-Mom Bias?

She has also seen different attitudes toward women raising families in the workplace that have drawn her attention and concern. Is there an anti-mother bias running rampant in the law business that would never be accorded other groups?

Says Epstein Henry during an interview: "When I was at a very big New York law firm as a summer associate, there was a large contingent of Orthodox Jews who ... observed the Sabbath and didn't work from Friday afternoon until Saturday night.

"This was a law firm that had a 24/7 culture, and it was entirely acceptable for the Orthodox Jews to take off those 24 hours, and there was never a question of their lack of commitment. It's just that this was a religious priority for them, and, of course, it was respected.

"In contrast, when women want to take off and have certain time for child-care reasons, there's always a stigma associated with it and a question about their level of commitment.

"And," she adds, "what I think is interesting is that it really demonstrates" management's "value judgment about what the time" requested "is actually spent doing."

But times are changing: Epstein Henry claims the recent recession and down economy have worked in favor of her argument for flex time in the law business.

"One of the things that has come out of the economic downturn is that employers are very uncertain of their staffing needs, and flexibility can actually be an asset to a prospective employer," she notes. "Employers are more reluctant to use a lawyer whom they don't know they're going to be able to keep busy in six months."

Among the topics expected to be discussed at the Feb. 1 event are the threat to the billable hour, the rise of new models of legal practice, the morphing of large law firms and the development of talent management strategies.

More information is available at: www.lawandreorder.com.