

# Attorney, And Mom, Wants It All

Flex-Time helps women juggle jobs and careers

By Diana Bletter

Even on vacation, Deborah Epstein Henry is busy working.

The Philadelphia lawyer and mother of three boys spent part of her summer vacation in Westhampton Beach trying to talk up a New York branch of Flex-Time, the support group for part-time lawyers that she started in Philadelphia three years ago. She is hoping that lawyers on the East End will take part in what she visualizes as a quiet revolution within the law field. She'd like to

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make flexible hours for lawyers a viable option so that women can "aggressively pursue their careers while still having children."

A support group sounds like a great idea, said Westhampton Beach attorney Elizabeth Pfister, "but I don't have the time right now!"

Ms. Pfister, 37, also juggles her private practice with her job as mother of Erin, three, and James Jr., 15 months. Instead of joining a more formal support group, Ms. Pfister said, she is part of an informal support group of lawyers who talk while waiting for their trials in the courthouse in Riverhead.

"We talk about who didn't sleep the night before and who has to finish her trial fast to rush her child to the doctor," Ms. Pfister said.

Ms. Henry said that Flex-Time Lawyers is perfect for mothers like Ms. Pfister, who don't want to sacrifice having children for their career, and who don't want to sacrifice their careers when they choose to have children.

Ms. Henry, 34, said that she is part of the first generation of women who are trying to "have it all, even though people say you can't have it all."

"We don't want to delay child-rearing until we're made partners in our law firms, and we don't want to stay home full-time either," Ms. Henry said in between changing her year-old son's diaper and breaking up a playful fight between her two oldest sons, 6 and 4.

Ms. Henry said that she started the support group because as a part-time lawyer in a Philadelphia law firm, she found she was isolated. She didn't exactly fit in with full-time mothers, she said, and full-time lawyers looked at her as if she wasn't carrying her load. But she said that the demands of parenting are so unpredictable that she wanted to be available for her children—"and not just at the end-of-year school play."



Lawyer Deborah Epstein Henry playing with her sons Oliver, left, Theodore and Spencer.

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Ms. Henry said she sent e-mail messages to six part-time lawyers she knew to invite them to an informal brown bag lunch at her law firm in Philadelphia. In less than 18 months, the group grew to 150 members, and now there are 250 lawyers who are part of her network.

She plans to take the idea to New York where she will lead a support group at the law firm of Skadden Arps Slate Meagher on September 24.

The New York City support group will also meet once each month to share practical information about networking, climbing the corporate ladder and how to handle work overflow.

With 50 percent of all law school students now women, Ms. Henry said, law firms need to take a more progressive approach to attorneys who "don't want to work 70 hours a week."

She said that for law firms, part-time lawyers make financial sense. If a lawyer quits a law firm she has worked at for six years, Ms. Henry said, the law firm loses \$200,000 in recruitment and training expenses.

But if the firm makes it easier for the lawyer to change her schedule to part-time, it's a win-win situation.

"The law firm then keeps the lawyer with experience," Ms. Henry said, "and she can continue her career."

Ms. Henry said that she realized she was breaking new ground when she was a 27-year-old, and visibly pregnant, law clerk for a federal judge in New York.

"Lawyers would come in and ask me where the law clerk was," Ms. Henry said. "I'd tell them, 'I'm right here.' They didn't expect the law clerk to be pregnant."

Ms. Pfister said that she had to put off having children until she was established in her law career. She worked for 10 years and then had her children. She said her mother and mother-in-law both help with babysitting as well as her husband, James, who works four days a week.

"The only way that you can have it all is if you have help," Ms. Pfister said with a laugh.

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