

Book addresses lawyers' work-life issues

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When **Deborah Epstein Henry** spoke with me about her new book, “Law & Reorder: Legal Industry Solutions for Restructure, Retention, Promotion & Work/Life Balance,” she said she felt she had come full circle. It was almost 11 years ago that I first wrote about Henry, then a litigation associate at Schnader Harrison Segal & Lewis, organizing lunchtime gatherings of female lawyers working reduced schedules at law firms.

Her efforts started in 1999 as an e-mail to six women lawyers asked to meet for brown-bag lunches, though she encouraged them to forward it to their friends also working reduced hours. Within days, Henry, who had only relocated from New York two years earlier and did not have a large circle of local contacts, received e-mails from 150 lawyers.

Those brown-bag lunches soon became incorporated as Flex-Time Lawyers LLC, a network of lawyers who could gain support and career and work/life advice while also being a vehicle for change. More than a decade later, that e-mail to six lawyers now has morphed into a listserv of 10,000 lawyers around the country with Henry regularly serving as a pundit for national media outlets.

Henry stopped practicing law in 2002 when she started a New York Flex-Time Lawyers chapter while at the same time establishing a consulting business. Although she remained affiliated with Schnader Harrison until 2007, she began writing more and consulting employers on work/life issues and their models of practice.

“I first began consulting on women’s issues, but it grew to workplace restructuring, talent management, work/life balance, and the retention and promotion of lawyers, with a focus on women,” Henry said.

Henry still serves as president of Flex-Time Lawyers, though she has closed the Philadelphia chapter and is focusing more on the New York one. In addition to her book, Henry this week officially launched [Law & Reorder](#), her consulting practice where the name is designed to reflect on a broader mission.

The idea for the book comes from problems in the legal industry that she thinks have grown worse during the recession. The book explores revamping the heirarchical law firm model and discusses how lawyers, firms and clients can align to reach common goals. She offers advice to legal employers on how best to re-align their practice model and to lawyers on how to navigate through the new working environment brought forth by the recession.

The book weaves in personal anecdotes from her own life with her thoughts on how lawyers and law firms can best deal with changing billing practices, new client demands, alternative practice models, new career paths and making firms more women-friendly and what the future of law firms might entail.

Henry was interviewed in my story on page 1 of today's [print edition \(subscription required\)](#) of the Philadelphia Business Journal regarding a study about gender inequity with pay at large law firms.

Roughly 50 percent of law firm graduates are women but only 16 percent of equity partners at large firms are. Henry said that means it is not a pipeline issue. She said firms need to do a better job tracking recruiting and attrition data and be more hospitable to work/life issues. A recent survey said work-life issues were by far the No. 1 reason women leave firms and the third-most popular reason men leave. She also noted that women have little power on the three main firm committees — executive, compensation and partner promotion — and have a tough time with certain elements of business development.

In a business where so much about a lawyer's production is based on hours billed, 40 percent of women lawyers work a reduced schedule at some point in their careers and 73 percent of those working reduced schedules are women. But Epstein Henry said if alternative fee structures truly take hold, lawyers will begin to be valued on merit and not hours billed.

"I don't think we'll return to those times and this is a real opportunity for lawyers to go down different paths to success," Henry said.