

# Creating Woman-Friendly Workplaces

Yale grad helps law firms with work/life balance issues

In 1999, Deborah Epstein Henry was struggling to be successful as both a commercial litigator and as a mother. When talking to former classmates at Yale University, where she received her undergraduate degree, she realized they were dealing with the same issues. "This was on everyone's minds...young [professional] women with kids and how to establish that elusive balance," Henry said.

Like many women, Henry eventually moved away from the day-to-day practice of law. But the Brooklyn Law School graduate still has close ties to the profession.

The mother of three boys, ages 12, 10 and 6, started Flex-Time Lawyers LLC, a consulting firm that advises law firms, corporations and lawyers on work/life balance and how to keep and promote women lawyers.

On Thursday, she will be the keynote speaker at a symposium called "Why Women Walk: The Female Brain Drain from the Profession and How to Stop It." The session at Quinnipiac School of Law is sponsored by the Connecticut Bar Association's Women in Law Futures Task Force, in association with the *Quinnipiac Law Review*.

Among other things, Henry, who lives near Philadelphia, will discuss "The Cheat Sheet," a guide to picking a woman-friendly employer and creating a woman-friendly workplace that she developed with the New York City Bar Association. Henry exchanged e-mails with *Law Tribune* contributor Joan Lee.

**LAW TRIBUNE:** What are the most challenging issues facing women lawyers?

**DEBORAH EPSTEIN HENRY:** The five biggest challenges to women lawyers are flexibility, leadership, mentoring, networking and advancement. These are the five areas where women historically stall and they are impediments to women succeeding at the higher levels. That is why "The Cheat Sheet" focused on these five principal areas.

**LAW TRIBUNE:** Could you explain how your company has helped women lawyers?

**HENRY:** First, it provides support and career guidance to male and female lawyers

**Deborah Epstein Henry, founder of a consulting firm called Flex-Time Lawyers LLC, will be the keynote speaker at a seminar at Quinnipiac School of Law on Thursday.**



seeking flexibility, women lawyers seeking greater success and lawyers who are transitioning back into the profession. Second, it provides networking opportunities for these lawyers by providing regular programming where attendees can meet and connect and also follow-up through a membership directory. Third, it provides a forum for information sharing and a vehicle for change. Flex-Time Lawyers LLC has brought law firms together to share and compare their policies and programs. [It also] conducts a national survey *Working Mother* magazine, where it annually reports on trends on work/life and women's issues in the legal profession.

**LAW TRIBUNE:** What is the biggest problem you usually see at law firms when it comes to the treatment of women?

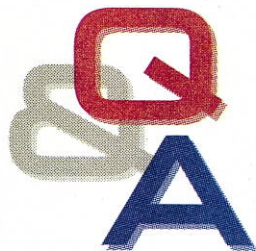
**HENRY:** Although work/life balance is no longer just a woman's issue, I see it as the biggest impediment to women's success at law firms. When women seek reduced hours, they are often stigmatized and no longer receive the good work. It often impedes their opportunities for advancement and ultimately results in them leaving law firms at higher rates.

**LAW TRIBUNE:** How do you convey that idea to people in charge of law firms?

**HENRY:** For a firm to be successful in the future, it has to rethink its structure to address the growing work/life demands of all generations of lawyers. I have developed a work/life methodology called FACTS that introduces work/life choices for all law firm lawyers and keeps the billable hours. FACTS stands for Fixed, Annualized, Core, Targeted and Shared hours and enables lawyers and supervisors to decide the expected target hours an attorney will work each year and the way in which they will work. With "Ge Y" pushing firms to re-think the way they work, and Boomers phasing into retirement over a longer period of time, firms that change the way they are structured to meet these demands will be at a competitive edge to win the war for talent.

**LAW TRIBUNE:** How have you been able to help law firms?

**HENRY:** Firms send me all of their work/life policies and I provide an analysis of what is fair, what is missing and what is against the trend in the profession. Then I typically draft, redraft or edit policies for firms. Once the policies are written, I help with the roll out. I give training presentations that explain why it is in a firm's financial interest to support the policies and how to make them work.



**On The Record**

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S. Malan  
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B. Scheffey  
Digester  
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Norm Pattis

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