

ABA Journal

Work/Life Balance

Fearful Associates Opt for Partner Face Time Over Work-at-Home Time

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The balance of power has shifted away from associates at big law firms who got top pay, demanded interesting work and flexible schedules.

Now associates fearing layoffs are more reluctant to raise workplace concerns and to ask for work-life balance accommodations, observers told the [National Law Journal](#). And with good reason. That's because some law firms have targeted part-time lawyers in layoffs.

Joan Williams, co-director of the Project for Attorney Retention, and Deborah Epstein Henry, president of work-life consulting firm Flex-Time Lawyers, reported the troubling trend. They say some law firms that haven't gotten serious about flexible work alternatives are discouraging such options and, in some cases, laying off part-timers.

The flip side is that some forward-thinking firms are using the economic downturn to allow more lawyers to adopt flexible schedules, according to Williams and Henry.

But some associates are so fearful of layoffs that they are unlikely to opt for work away from the office, even if it's offered, because they want face time with decision-making partners, according to Sheri Michaels, who leads the global associate practice group at legal placement firm Major, Lindsey & Africa.

Associates are also less likely to demand challenging tasks, sabbaticals and technology allowances, according to the story.

Michaels told the NLJ she understands associates' fear. "If I were an associate, I would keep my head down. I wouldn't want to be the one asking for anything," she said.