

Moi--The Status Quo?

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I'm largely amused to be called "[a mouthpiece for the status quo](#)" by [Flex-Time Lawyers](#) founder Deborah Epstein Henry. As you might know, Henry took umbrage at my recent post, "[Business Case for Work/Life Balance--Really?](#)," in which I questioned whether law firms and companies actually care about the balance issue beyond using it as a public relations prop.

Really, I've been called a lot of names, but never a member of the establishment. So I'll take that as a sign that I've somehow arrived.

Truth is, I did hesitate about writing that post. I knew I was stepping into a political minefield. It's also difficult to challenge the work/life balance movement, because I mostly support the cause. How can anyone not be for work/life balance?

The [blog Ms. JD](#) accurately describes the ambivalence many of us feel about waging any kind of criticism about the work/life balance agenda:

I can't tell you how many "off the record" conversations I've had with women who are 100 percent committed to advancing other women in the profession, [yet who question] the work/life balance argument of Henry and others like her. But it's never voiced.

I think partly that's because we all are hyper-aware that any "cat-fighting" will quickly distract from our common cause. I think partly it's because we're all committed to "women helping women" and truly don't want to spend time undercutting one another.

So why am I airing the disagreements now? Well, for some time now, women lawyers have been urging me to challenge the movement's tenets. Some of them, ironically, work at the very firms and companies that have been touted by Flex-Time (in conjunction with Working Mother magazine) as the [best places for women](#) on their annual list. Clearly, there's a divide between those who have become the high priestesses of the balance movement and those who are working in the lawyer trenches.

What's true is that the push for work/life balance has given more lawyers the option of part-time or off-site work--something that was far less available ten years ago or so. But the flip side is that some of those family-friendly offerings can be traps that do little to further women's progress in the long run.

"My work is deadly and dead-end," says a part-time lawyer at a big firm that's made the coveted "best" place list several times. "I have flexibility, which is good for my quality of life, but I have no career." The work is so "dreadful," she adds, that she's thinking of quitting big law altogether to work full-time with a nonprofit.

"As long as we have part-time positions that some sucker will take, there's no need to look at the discrimination women really face," says a senior lawyer at a corporation that endorsed Henry's book, *Law & Reorder*. "It's a camouflage." Highly competent women, she adds, regularly get passed over for promotions: "Flex-time doesn't do much for those of us who are trying to get ahead."

For better or worse, I've put the work/life balance issue on the table. So let's start having an honest discussion about how this is really affecting women's careers.

As for my being the status quo mouthpiece: Hello big firms and companies out there--are you listening? It's me, the Careerist blogger. Please send money!