



Billable hours, around-the-clock client calls, too few women at the top. Lawyer moms know all the reasons their profession isn't considered family-friendly. Here, five working mothers share how they're making it work—and how the Best Law Firms for Women help.

BY KATHERINE REYNOLDS LEWIS



Just when you think you've got both family and career humming

along nicely, something upsets the balance. Your toddler stops sleeping through the night. Your preschooler starts biting at daycare. Your first grader's teacher suggests your child might need to be evaluated for a possible learning delay.



Amy Siegel, an entertainment lawyer and partner in O'Melveny & Myers' Century City, CA, office, was struggling with one of those stages—her son's transition to one nap from two—when it occurred to her: Why couldn't the firm support working parents by providing the useful, vetted information they need? It would save moms like her endless hours of Google searching,

reduce their worry burden, and free them to dive into work with a clear conscience. "There are so many different milestones, and you need to pay attention," says Amy, mom of Ethan, 5, and Spencer, 2. "You kind of want to have a cheat sheet."

That germ of an idea became ParentWings, an on-demand, vendor-provided parenting advice service that is now free to all

O'Melveny & Myers lawyers. A team of parenting experts gives confidential one-on-one consultations on questions ranging from behavior, development, nutrition and sleep to preparing a child for the birth of a new sibling. The program complements the firm's other family-friendly benefits, such as lactation support, subsidized backup childcare, transition coaching and an automatic

reduced-hours schedule for six months following maternity leave. And it's only one of the very real-life ways that the *Working Mother* and Flex-Time Lawyers Best Law Firms for Women are striving to serve their working-parent lawyers.

Here, we take a peek into the workplace culture at winning firms through the lens of four other moms'

stories to show how, in one of the nation's toughest professions, their employers are making it possible for women to thrive both at work and at home.

Out of the Frying Pan

In her first year at Goodwin Procter, a firm she'd joined as a six-year associate, Elaine Herrmann Blais discovered she was pregnant. Concerned she hadn't had

an 80 percent schedule—something she's stuck with ever since as she's raised Jack, 13, and Oliver, 10. And yet she also jumped right onto two teams preparing for trials coming up in just a few months. "As a litigator, there's nothing more fun than trying cases," she explains. "I agreed to be on both teams, which might have been crazy. There's nothing like ripping the

Today, Elaine is the first to say her weeks can sometimes swing out of balance, veering from a 150 percent work schedule to a 50 percent one. (Notably, Goodwin Procter—where a fifth of all lawyers elevated to equity partner last year worked reduced hours—trues up each attorney's compensation with annual billable hours, so that lawyers are paid for the schedule they actually

all partners a three-month sabbatical every five years. Attorney teams work together to cover for partners who are out, and partners are comfortable with the idea of trusting their cases to their colleagues. "That makes it a little bit easier for people to swallow the idea of somebody going out on maternity leave," Joanna says.

An additional benefit: Junior attorneys gain experience with higher-level work earlier in their careers than they otherwise might. "Sometimes I've gotten my best opportunities when the partner I was working with went on sabbatical and I was the only one in the office who knew employment law," says Joanna. "Sometimes as a junior attorney, you'll spend a year hardly even talking to a client. I got experience thinking and solving problems for clients quickly."

Now that Joanna is a partner herself, her focus on teamwork continues with her associate and paralegal. "We all cover for one another," she says. "Everybody is informed about what's going on in cases, who the clients are and what they might need. It's not unusual at all for my clients to talk to the paralegal I work with or my assistant."

At home, Joanna's son, Thaddeus, 12, plays travel baseball and basketball, so she's been known to answer an email or take a call on the sidelines of a game, with daughter Stella, 7, often in tow. "The hardest thing about this job is that it follows me everywhere, and that's also the best thing about this job," she says. "My kids have had to



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—ELAINE HERRMANN BLAIS

time to accumulate the political capital and relationships necessary to navigate a litigation career alongside caring for a newborn, she was relieved when Brenda Sharton—a more experienced litigator with two sons—gave her a call.

"We talked about how the key to success is setting expectations," recalls Elaine, now an equity partner and head of litigation for Goodwin Procter's Boston office. "If you set an expectation that you're going to work from home one day a week and you surpass that expectation by coming into the office, everyone's thrilled with you. If you set an expectation that you're still going to be a 2,300-hour-a-year lawyer but you aren't, people are going to be disappointed."

So when Elaine returned from her six-month maternity leave, she set that expectation, asking for

Band-Aid off" and getting back to work.

Even so, Elaine stuck to her four-day-a-week schedule until the week of each trial and then worked around the clock. Challenged and invigorated, she began building relationships that continue to be important to her to this day. Indeed, her work on both trials was a big factor in her election to partner the following year. (A law-firm partner receives more pay than an associate and is responsible for bringing in new clients; an equity partner is one who also shares in the firm's profits.)

From that initial back-to-work experience, Elaine says she learned that the most satisfying work can often be crazy demanding—but that it's OK. "The hardest times are when work is kind of medium and it's not as enjoyable," she says now.

work.) "Being on a flexible schedule means *everyone* has to be flexible, including you," she says. "It's a bit of a roller coaster. You might drive home in tears sometimes because you miss your kids, but then maybe you won't go to work for 10 days."

Team Flex

Joanna Vilos has taken two six-month maternity leaves since joining Holland & Hart straight out of law school, in 2003. Both times, her colleagues covered for her seamlessly during her leave and happily handed back her cases when she returned. "It was easy to integrate back in. It was like I'd never been gone," recalls Joanna, who works in the firm's Cheyenne, WY, office. "We have such an environment of teamwork and collaboration."

One cornerstone in that culture is a policy that gives

become understanding that sometimes there will be interruptions. I'll have to take a call when we're driving to a Colorado Rockies game. They understand it's worth the trade-off."

Simply put, without a flexible work culture, says Joanna, "I don't think I would have stayed with the profession because I would have missed too many things."

Sharing the Load

When Diana Kruze met fellow working mom Alexis Amezcua, they instantly related to each other, and she knew they would become like sisters. In addition to a close friendship, the partners at Morrison

Dani, 3, and son Hawk, 1. "When you have someone at your same level who you trust and who's there for you, it takes a whole level of stress off."

Work sharing is one of two solutions that Diana is shaping as she represents Morrison Foerster as part of a team in the Women in Law Hackathon, a national competition at Stanford Law School in June, in which a *Shark Tank*-like panel of judges selects the most promising ideas for closing the gender gap in corporate law. Her team, which includes senior partners from a variety of law firms, a law student and an expert on women and diversity, is targeting the

24/7," Diana says. "You get better work product. You don't have one person working 14-hour days; you have two people working seven-hour days. Your effectiveness and creativity drop after you've exceeded a certain number of hours of work per day."

Staying Close

Arnold & Porter partner Gaela Gehring Flores loves the convenience of having her 4-year-old daughter, Zelig, enrolled in the firm's on-site childcare center in Washington, DC. If her workday is running past pickup time, she can bring Zelig to her office to play while Mom wraps up a final email or two. "It's not

factor," she says. "It's so comforting knowing that my baby is here with me."

At her tender age, Zelig has already traveled with her mom to London, Mexico, Panama and Peru for hearings or depositions in work on international arbitration cases, as has Gaela's older daughter, Sol, 13. "With both of my daughters, since I was going to have this international practice, I decided I would take them with me whenever possible," she says. "It comes from feeling safe in an institution that would never question that."

When Zelig was born, Gaela used the 18 weeks of paid maternity leave Arnold & Porter offers, as well as another 11 weeks of unpaid leave. After that, her husband became the primary caregiver, working around the demands of his solo law practice and accepting part-time babysitting from nearby family members until Zelig was 2½ and went to the children's center.

Since Gaela joined the firm in 2007, she says she has always felt supported in working out whatever work life juggling she and her husband need to do to manage their legal careers and the four children in their blended family, which also includes sons Xavier, 14, and Lucas, 11.

"I do hear horror stories of women in law firms having conversations with management where they say you'll have to dial it back a little bit about being a mom," she says. "Here, there are so many women who are role models at not being quiet about being a mom. I don't feel like I'm swimming upstream." ■



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Foerster's San Francisco office have developed a strong work-sharing partnership on a joint case involving copyright and breach of contract. If Alexis is on vacation for a week, Diana covers for her. If Diana's on a special date with her husband, Alexis handles any client calls that come in. Each has a specific area of focus, but each is current enough to handle anything that comes up under the other's purview.

"Work sharing, to me, is the most exciting thing since sliced bread," says Diana, mom of daughter

five-year period during which women typically make partner, a time before and after the actual promotion when women lawyers need extra support. (The other idea her Hackathon team is exploring is how to harness data analytics to understand the challenges and successes related to that important career stage, and then create solutions related to retention and business development.)

In a formal work share, "the client gets grade-A service because there's always somebody who's on call or has the responsibility

an uncommon thing," she says of her fellow lawyer parents who do the same. "People like it. People meet your children and drop in and say hi."

The coziness of having kiddos on-site extends to the corporate elevators—where toddlers mingle with partners and firm leadership—and the childcare center's annual Halloween parade that winds through the office. Then there's the practical benefit of having Zelig so close: Gaela is close by in the event of an emergency or illness. "It's such a positive psychological