

The Legal Intelligencer

THE OLDEST LAW JOURNAL IN THE UNITED STATES

Part-Time Attorneys: You're Not Alone

*New Informal Group
Meets to Discuss Issues*

BY JEFF BLUMENTHAL

Of the Legal Staff

As a part-time associate at Schnader Harrison Segal & Lewis, Deborah Epstein Henry balances her career as a commercial litigator at a big firm with her equally demanding roles as a wife and the mother of two small boys.

After commiserating through informal lunchtime discussions with three colleagues dealing with the same predicament, Henry decided local part-time attorneys needed a forum to express their views and have an opportunity to meet others like themselves.

She e-mailed part-time attorneys and recruiting professionals around town and asked them to spread the word that a group was being formed to discuss part-time issues during monthly brown-bag luncheon sessions. Six months later, Henry's group, which does not have a formal name, has an e-mail membership list of 100 attorneys and regularly sees 25 to 30 participants attend each meeting.

"We're making it a place where part-time attorneys can come and express their voice, have an awareness that there are other people out there like them and that we're in it together," Henry said. "I think it's rewarding to find out that you're not alone, and you also realize that together we can have some power. It's also a great cross-section of lawyers who learn from each other how to become a better part-time lawyer."

The group has also drawn the attention of Philadelphia Bar Association chancellor Doreen Davis, herself a working mother,

who will host Henry's next meeting at Montgomery McCracken Walker & Rhoads. Davis was approached after Henry saw that the chancellor's speech last month placed part-time attorney issues at the top of her agenda. Aside from learning more about the group and its concerns, Davis said she wants to see if there is any overlap between Henry's group and any of the bar association's women in the profession subcommittees.

"I never knew this group existed before Debbie called me," Davis said. "And I was amazed to see how big it was."

Participants come mainly from large firms, but there are several members from smaller firms, in-house counsel and governmental positions, Henry said. So far, though, the group consists entirely of female attorneys, even though meetings are open to men.

Henry prepares topics such as coping with the negative perception of part-time lawyers by many of their colleagues, negotiating deals with firms concerning hours, pay and benefits, networking as a part-timer, part-time partnership and striking a balance between work and family responsibilities. The group also provided input to the drafters of the model policies for part-time scheduling, which the bar association board of governors passed as a resolution last month.

"A lot of us are working 40 hours a week and are dealing with a stigma [from other attorneys] that we're taking some kind of

short cut," Henry said. "A lot of what our group deals with is wanting to advance [in our careers] but not working 70 hours a week. A lot of women are scared to take advantage of part-time scheduling opportunities because they fear it will affect their advancement [to partnership] or they'll be perceived as not being a team player by their colleagues.

"People have asked me, 'How can a litigator work part-time?' And people address that differently. Me, I still have important cases, I just take less of them. But if one of my cases blows up then I'll come into the office and switch my schedule around."

In a recent National Directory of Legal Employers study, Philadelphia was one of 13 cities where all the responding firms reported that they offered part-time scheduling. But only 4.5 percent of Philadelphia attorneys surveyed take advantage of the part-time option — 1.6 percent of partners and 7.5 percent of associates. Henry believes many women fear being placed on the "mommy track" and don't wish to be branded with the stigma that comes with that.

"I think strides have been made, but it's still a big problem for a lot of women who want to be on the partnership track and are willing to make concessions like delaying partnership for a year or two," Henry said. "Firms have to realize that advancing our cause is in their best interest. They spend the time training us, so why wind up losing us because of being intolerant about part-time issues?"

Henry believes firms must combat negative stereotypes of part-time attorneys and become more flexible in trusting attorneys to get work done via telecommuting.



HENRY