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## Part-Time Partners: Making It Work

By Carisa Chappell



*Members of Flex-Time Lawyers LLC, a support organization for lawyers with reduced schedules.*

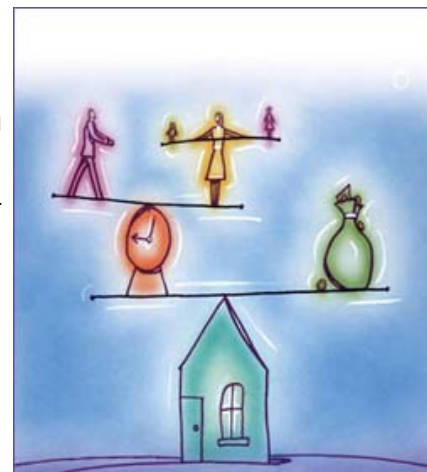
For many women, success in law seems to come with an “either/or” choice: Either sacrifice family for success, or find another job with more manageable hours. While female associates still leave law firms at higher rates than their male counterparts, others are refusing to make this choice. Instead, these women are proving that lawyers can be just as successful on a part-time schedule—even achieving the rank of partner. While it’s not always easy to request a part-time work arrangement, many women who have done it say that they have been able to make it work.

When Beth Haas gave birth to her daughter just more than four years ago, she was in her eighth year of practice as a litigation associate at Blank Rome in Philadelphia. She also had three stepchildren and a husband who was a successful and equally busy partner at another major firm. Yearning for some extra time to spend with her new daughter, she set out to establish a more manageable four-day work week arrangement. Although there were several part-time associates, Haas says that at the time she sought a part-time schedule, there were no part-time partners at Blank Rome. “The arrangement is working well for me and it must be working for the firm, because after working four days per week for more than three years, I was elected partner.”

### Negotiating Flexibility

Haas and others are refuting the belief that a decrease in hours is equivalent to less dedication to the firm. She believes that partners who have earned the respect of their clients and colleagues will have an easier time negotiating fewer hours. “They would rather have less of you than none of you,” says Haas. “First, work hard and make yourself indispensable to your clients and to those with whom you work. This will ensure that your part-time or flex-time request will be accommodated.”

Alison Bauer of Torys LLP in New York City has been working part-time since 2001. She came to Torys when she was five months pregnant and seeking reduced hours. “So along with switching firms, I had to negotiate my part-time issue at the same time,” says Bauer.



She says that although there were some attorneys who had been on special arrangements at the firm in the past, she was the only associate seeking a part-time arrangement for a family matter. A somewhat difficult task for Bauer and the firm was made easier through trust and

mutual respect. She negotiated a 60 percent schedule in 2001; when she was promoted to partner last February, she moved up to a 75 percent work schedule. "The firm had to have a lot of faith in me to believe that I would come back from maternity leave and meet the expectations of the firm on a part-time schedule," Bauer comments.

Many professional women, including partners, find it hard to negotiate a flexible or part-time work schedule to balance family and career. Ioanna Chaney, personal and professional coach with Forward Alliance in Chicago, says that although flexible schedules are becoming more common, a lot of women still struggle with the decision to work fewer hours. "Many are afraid to have that conversation with their managers, lest they may be thought of as 'not professional enough' for having made such a request. Professional women are also frustrated because they often have to compete in the workforce with men who don't have similar conflicts."

Dr. Ellen Ostrow, founder of Lawyers Life Coach in Silver Spring, Md., provides personal and career coaching for lawyers determined to achieve professional success and a fulfilling life. Many times, her coaching includes her help in developing an effective proposal for reduced hours or a flexible work schedule.

"Women don't necessarily negotiate as aggressively as they could—they tend to assume that the offer on the table is the only one possible," says Ostrow. "Sometimes coaching helps them remember that it is a negotiation and to get clear on what their terms are."

Erin Williams, a partner in the Dallas office of Sedgwick, Detert, Moran & Arnold LLP, has been working part-time since January 2006. She says the key to making it work is being a tried-and-true employee, like she has been in the past. "I wanted to continue to practice law, but couldn't do it in the way I had done before. It was both parties' willingness to make it work that allowed the arrangement to work."

Already troubled by 7 p.m. calls from her then two-year-old daughter asking when she would be home, Emilia Quesada, pregnant with her second child, was haunted by thoughts of the guilt of working long hours, multiplied by two. "For me, the answer was simple: Reduce my hours and spend more time with my children," says Quesada, who joined the business/commercial litigation department of Adorno & Yoss LLP in 2003 on a reduced-hour schedule.

### Meeting Client Demands

Flexibility and technology are keys to being successful in a part-time work arrangement. In addition to a willingness to put in hours outside of the office, join a last-minute conference call or help put the fires out on a deal gone bad, partners are taking advantage of technology in order to stay in touch with the office while working fewer hours.



Williams works five days a week and leaves a little earlier to pick up her young daughter from school. "I check my email and voice mail twice to make sure something hasn't come in later," says Williams. "Most of my clients realize that my hours are reduced, so if they need to reach me, they have my cell phone number or they can email me."

Quesada says that there are times when work needs to be done after her official workday has ended and, thanks to technology, she does not need to be physically present at the firm to handle business. "I can do it from the comfort of my home, after I have put the kids to sleep, by logging into my firm's network. I am always 'connected' and available to my

clients, through my BlackBerry, home network connection, cell phone, direct fax line, and every other means of communication."

Bauer recalls a funny situation when she had to take a conference call while home with her child, who kept calling for her in the background. Once the call ended, she asked her associate how disruptive it was, and he replied, "It was just obvious that the sounds were coming from your end because he kept saying 'Mama,' and you were the only woman on the call."

"Sometimes it's hard to plan family time because you may have to speak to the client when matters are pressing and you don't know when the next conference call is going to be requested," says Bauer. "You are going to have to take the call and I think it creates a higher stress level."

"As a partner, you have more responsibility to the clients and balancing time can be an issue," Bauer continues.

Haas agrees, and says that she spends much more time on scheduling and organizing related tasks to help ensure that she sticks to the schedule.

It also takes discipline and organization to not let the lines blur between work and family. When

situations call for urgent meetings and tight deadlines, sometimes it is necessary to work during "off" days. In these cases, partners tend to rework their schedules, knowing that after things calm down, they can resume their flexible schedule and enjoy life outside of lawyering.

"When I am with my children, I am 100 percent focused and dedicated to them and meeting their needs," says Quesada, who says that she "hangs her lawyer hat on her rearview mirror" as she parks the car, and steps into the house with open arms for her children to run to.

### Work/Life Balance

Women partners especially struggle with finding a balance between work and life without sacrificing their careers. Increasingly, women want to continue to climb the corporate ladder while still finding quality time to spend with their family.

"Professional women find themselves pulled in too many directions, and they pride themselves in trying to be great at everything—career, motherhood, romance, friendships, community work—and when they can't, they blame themselves or feel inadequate," explains Chaney. In some instances, the experts say that employees who try to do it all may blame their employer for giving them too large of a workload or expect unreasonable accommodations to help lessen the stress.

Any accommodation requiring significant difficulty or expense, when considered in light of the firm's size, financial resources, and the structure of its operation, can impose an undue hardship on the employer.

As an example, an employee's request for a personal secretary to help stay organized or asking for afternoon work hours exclusively when most business transactions take place in the morning, can be viewed as unreasonable expectations from the partner.

However, highly regarded partners who make reasonable requests with respect to their firm are individuals that have come up with a way to help juggle family and career.

Quesada admits that by working reduced hours, it helps not to have to cram in every single errand, chore, and other obligation into only two days off, the coveted weekend. "This allows for more quality time over the weekend to do otherwise enjoyable things, such as picking strawberries in Miami's beautiful strawberry fields, going to the zoo, taking the kids to the beach, and so forth," she says.

Unforeseen circumstances, such as the death of a family member or becoming the primary caregiver for an elderly parent, can also result in partners needing less time in the office and more time at home.

The unexpected death of her husband made Williams rethink her work versus family commitments. "My obstacles were personal in terms of being a litigator and trying to work and travel and be a new single parent. I went back full time shortly after he passed and just couldn't do it. I have a two-year-old and I have no family in the state," says Williams.

Although Williams has had to give up some control and push some work down to her more senior associates—admitting that she is very controlling when it comes to her files—she says that it is something that she needed to do anyway, and so far it has worked well.

"This arrangement has allowed me to continue to practice law in a firm while being a daily, single parent of a toddler, otherwise I wouldn't be able to do it," says Williams.

Williams says that delegating work to associates really forced her to evaluate what she needs to do as a partner and what she needs to do for her clients. While she is sensitive to the schedules of the associates at her firm, she believes that by allowing them to take on more responsibility, it helps everyone in the long run.

"It has worked out very well because it gives the associates more experience and I can allow them to do some things that save the clients money."

"Personally, I found that being open and honest has allowed us to figure out ways to make things work better," says Williams of her colleagues. "They can ask me 'What do you think you can do?' and I can easily say 'yes' or 'no.' "

Haas says that "balance" is a strange word because it is not possible for work and home life to be in perfect equilibrium like the scales of justice, yet it is possible to learn to allow work concerns to take priority sometimes and home concerns to take priority at others.

"As a result, my part-time schedule has resulted in greater happiness and fulfillment at home, and has also caused me to be happier and more productive at work," says Haas, adding that she is happy to serve as a role model to younger associates wanting a rewarding career as well as a successful home life.

"Think of balance as a verb and not a noun," says consultant Ostrow, who says that like a punching bag, women are going to get knocked off balance, but they have to re-center themselves. "That means you have to be clear about why you're doing what you're doing and what your priorities are and not let yourself get distracted."

As a result of this search for balance, Chaney says that more professional women are turning to a coach to help with work/life balance issues. "Coaching helps professional women define a future vision and long-term goals, set value-based priorities and clear boundaries, and make conscious choices and trade-offs."

### Less Time to Socialize

Lengthy water cooler conversations and extravagant lunches have had to take a backseat for women with part-time arrangements.

Quesada and other part-time partners say that in order to make the reduced-hour schedule work, partners have to be very disciplined and efficient with their time, which means making personal sacrifices.

"No more one-to-two hour lunches at luxurious restaurants with your friends, or joining a group of colleagues for lunch to celebrate birthdays, and so forth. I maximize my time at the office by working through lunch," says Quesada, who points out that when she does go out to lunch it is usually with clients or to attend networking lunches to be as productive as possible.

While not able to partake in the more informal events that go on after work, Bauer chooses to attend the ones where she is going to get more bang for the buck. "You definitely have to pick and choose which social activities you attend," conveys Bauer.

"I think clients realize that they're more likely to get a job done efficiently and effectively because I have outside interests," continues Bauer. "So I'm not spending as much time at the water cooler."

Williams says that her partners understand that her hours are reduced and she will not be able to make every lunch or event like she had in the past, but says that occasionally she can get a babysitter in the evening if she has to attend a client dinner or firm event.

### Erasing the Stigma

"Some believe that part-time for lawyers is the kiss of death," says Deborah Epstein Henry, founder of Flex-Time Lawyers LLC, a support organization for lawyers who have flexible or reduced schedules and seek a work/life resource in the legal industry.

Although strides have been made throughout recent years to disprove that line of thinking, women partners say that in some instances, they still have some convincing to do.

Bauer says that it is hard for other partners in general to understand that one could be fully committed to the firm and yet have a part-time arrangement. "They say, 'How could you be 100 percent committed if you're saying you'll only be here 75 percent of the time?' " Bauer explains.

"It's getting the mindset to move and have people understand that no single partner works 100 percent of the time for a client; they have multiple clients. Should it matter that they can't serve these clients' needs because they're out with client A or because they're at a golf course versus if I'm at my child's school?"

"In the end, I become more accessible on my day off because I'm better able to pick up the phone with my kids than if I were in another meeting with a client," says Bauer.

Acceptance of part-time partners can vary from firm to firm and the environment can make a difference in the success of a partner with a reduced schedule. "I think that it ultimately boils down to the firm and the culture they inspire," says Quesada, who comments that almost a decade ago when she worked at Steel Hector & Davis LLP (which last year combined with Squire, Sanders & Dempsey LLP) there were several women partners who worked a reduced-hour schedule who were highly regarded and respected at the firm.

"I believe that many law firms—though not enough of them—are coming to terms with the reality that inflexibility is not better for business. In fact, it has just the opposite effect," says Quesada.

Ostrow says that the ease in which flexible work arrangements can be made also depends on the firm, and even as reduced-hour work schedules gain popularity, there is still a tremendous stigma attached to it.

"Implementing flexible schedules across the board is difficult. Even if the firm has a policy for it, the firm's policy doesn't dictate the attitudes of everyone else in the firm," says Ostrow.

"You have a range of attitudes to contend with, which means a range of people who will respect your schedule as well as others who will make assumptions about your career commitment that may adversely affect your opportunity for advancement," continues Ostrow.

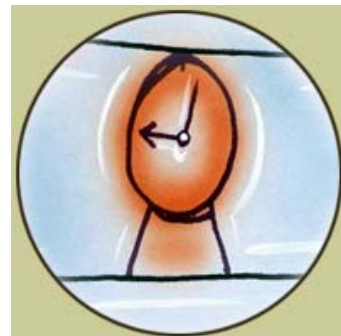
### Firm and Partner Benefits

Holly Stein Sollod is the flex-time advisor at Holland & Hart in Denver, which has had a flex-time policy since 1986. According to Sollod, the firm recognizes that despite a strong commitment to the law practice, a lawyer may find that other concerns necessitate requesting a reduced-hour work arrangement.

Quesada says that by offering flexibility to women lawyers, firms will be able to maintain top-quality professionals.

"Not only should flexibility be a real and viable option, partnership should not be withheld from women simply because a woman works a reduced-hour schedule. A great lawyer is a great lawyer—man or woman, full-time or part-time," says Quesada.

Sollod, who is chair of the Securities Litigation, Government Investigation, and White Collar Crime practice group, says flexibility is one of the things that her firm prides itself on. "Our firm believes that partners can and will remain committed professionals while working on a reduced schedule, and that schedule should not suspend a partner's opportunities for professional growth, experience, and career advancement," says Sollod.



Sollod, who has practiced at the firm for 20 years, became partner while on maternity leave 17 years ago, and then worked flextime a number of years while her daughter was young. "Without it, I would be in a very different place today," Sollod admits.

As flex-time advisor, Sollod's job is to work with partners seeking flex-time status or who wish to remain on that status. "The flex-time advisor assists partners in preparing their plans, including asking other attorneys to cooperate and participate in making such plans successful and, if requested, serve as a liaison with the department chair, administrative partner, and management committee," says Sollod.

"The benefits for the firm and the partners are self-evident. Many of our best and brightest partners have been able to continue their careers at the pace of their choosing," continues Sollod. "This flexibility fosters loyalty, excellence, and commitment to the firm."

Sollod says many partners have taken advantage of the program over the years. Currently, there are 10 female partners and two male partners on flex-time schedules.

Flex-time partners at Holland & Hart may receive an upward proactive adjustment if the percentage of time they actually work is materially greater than what they had planned. "So partners are not penalized by committing to an 80 percent flex-time program and then working at 90 percent. If that happens, they get paid at 90 percent for the year," says Sollod.

Haas says that since adopting a part-time schedule, her effectiveness at the office has increased substantially. "In terms of efficiency and work product, I believe that a part-time lawyer can be an enormous—but sometimes underappreciated—asset to law firms and their clients."

### Support

Deborah Epstein Henry, founder of Flex-Time Lawyers LLC, relocated to Philadelphia because of her husband. It was 1997; she was pregnant and making a lateral move and at the same time negotiating her 75 percent schedule.

While Henry, now the mother of three boys, says that the firm—where she was practicing as a commercial litigator and is now of counsel—was very supportive, it was also fairly isolating to work part-time.

When Henry decided to email six part-time lawyers to hold a brown bag lunch group, she realized she had struck a nerve. One hundred and fifty lawyers responded, and she knew that she was not alone in her quest to establish balance.

Seven years have passed since Henry formed Flex-Time Lawyers, and she has a mailing list of more than 1900 lawyers. "It really started out of my own need for a support group, but there was obviously a tremendous need from other lawyers for support on these issues."

The members are mostly working mothers juggling career and family, from junior associates all the way to partners. They meet bimonthly in Philadelphia and New York to discuss topics relating to work/life balance and women in law and occasionally hear guest speakers.

"It really helps to have a network of lawyers who face the same issues and who can learn from their mistakes and successes," says Henry.

Henry says that many things have come out of the group, including support and career guidance and a tremendous networking opportunity. "We network on everything from clients to nannies."

"Another piece of the mission of the group is that it has been a vehicle for change; it is a venue for information sharing where we can see what's working and what isn't with respect to work/life and women's issues," explains Henry. Managers of diversity and committee representatives also attend the meetings.

Haas and Bauer are both members of Flex-Time Lawyers and find the group's meetings extremely helpful. "Flex-Time Lawyers is an invaluable resource for information to find out what the marketplace holds and what competitors are doing or not doing, and to get ideas for policy structure," says Bauer.

"It's supportive and empowering to walk into a room and find out that there are 100 other women struggling with the same issues I am," says Bauer.

### Advice

With more partners working reduced hours, there are bound to be more support groups formed and flex-time policies initiated. Partners stress that it is important that firms realize that less hours does not mean less service.

When contemplating a flex-time schedule, Sollod advises lawyers to talk to the women who have done so over the years to see how they have been treated, if their practices have grown and developed, and how they have been compensated. "Some firms give lip service to the concept," she says.

Quesada concurs and says that it is important to see how the firm has treated other women who have requested a part-time schedule. "Be flexible and realistic; perhaps the firm where you are currently working has been used to you working full-time and sacrificing yourself at all cost, and it may not be the ideal firm for you to work a reduced-hour schedule."

Recognizing that there is no such thing as a perfect work/life balance and having it all, Haas says, "You can take pride, however, in knowing that with a lot of desire and extra effort, you can succeed professionally while maintaining a personal life outside the office."

Sima Safaee, a life-balance coach based in Corona, Calif., says that women should stay mindful of the deeper meaning of their purpose in seeking a reduced-hours schedule and take steps to ensure they have a balanced life. She says that accountability, motivation, and life balance are the top three reasons that women lawyers and executives are turning to a coach for help.

"Do an assessment of who you are—find out more about yourself, your values, your purpose, and your calling," advises Safaee.

Partners working reduced hours say that the pros of working fewer hours far outweigh the cons, even if it means disproving the naysayers and taking a cut in pay. "It's worth every penny when I'm spending time with my daughter," says Haas.

Quesada adds that, "In perfecting the art of efficiency, my clients and children get the best of me, because when I am focused on one or the other, they are my top priority at that given moment."

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Carisa Chappell is a freelance writer based in Bowie, Md. For additional information about Flex-Time Lawyers LLC, log on to [www.flextimelawyers.com](http://www.flextimelawyers.com)

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