



Flex-time lawyer and Deborah Epstein Henry stays on the fast track with help from friends.

Part-Timers Unite

AN ATTORNEY WITH TWO YOUNG SONS, ages 5 and 2, Deborah Epstein Henry decided to reduce her work hours—and suddenly felt very alone in her office. So she launched Philadelphia Flex-Time Lawyers in July 1999 to swap tips with others on how to succeed in a fast-track career on a part-time and flex schedule. We asked Henry, who works for Schnader Harrison Segal & Lewis LLP, to share the “whys” and “hows” of setting up a professional support network.

WM: Why did you start the group?

Henry: So we could share information—what works for us and what doesn’t. I thought it would be empowering and a good social network. And I’ve also found it’s an opportunity to dispel myths about part-time professionals in general.

WM: How did you spread the word?

Henry: I sent E-mails to other part-time lawyers I knew and asked them to forward the message to anyone else they thought would be interested. In less than 18 months, the group grew to 150 members.

WM: How does it work?

Henry: I’ve purposely kept it informal. We have a brown-bag lunch at a different law firm each month. I send invitations by E-mail, so the only commitment is to RSVP. We discuss a different topic

each time, from how part-time associates can become partners, to striking a balance between work and home, to how part-time status impacts our work.

WM: Why only lawyers?

Henry: A lot of issues are common to all part-timers, so it’s tempting to invite people from all fields. But I think our group has been successful because we all know the nitty-gritty details of our particular career. If you have all types of professionals, topics may be too far afield, and you’ll lose some of the networking benefits.—A.A.

Networking 101

Considering a career move? It’s time to expand your circle of colleagues. Four fears and how to get past them:



“I don’t want to be a bother.” Tell yourself: Most people want to help, and they feel good when you ask them to.



“I don’t know what to talk about.” Tell yourself: You’re not calling to ask for a job. You just want information about what they do.



“I’m afraid to go to events where I don’t know anyone.” Tell yourself: The best way to meet people is to go to a function alone.



“I hate making cold calls.” Tell yourself: You’re contacting people you’ve met through an introduction by a mutual acquaintance.

ILLUSTRATIONS, XPLANE.COM

Do-It-Yourself Sabbatical

WOULDN’T IT BE GREAT TO GET PAID TO *not* work? This isn’t just a fantasy at companies that offer sabbaticals. Employers say they’re a valuable way to give dedicated workers a change of scenery and prevent burnout. Unfortunately, only 3 percent of companies offer paid sabbaticals (12 percent offer unpaid), according to the Society for Human Resource Management. But even if you’re not lucky enough to work for one of them, you can still finagle a refreshing break. Three options: **CHUNK OF TIME.** To secure a lengthier break than normal, skip long weekends to save up vacation time, stockpile your days off till next year, borrow some time from next year to use now, or negotiate overtime hours into extra time off, suggests Bonnie Michaels, president of the consulting group Managing Work & Family. **UNPAID TIME.** If your family finances can handle it, ask for a longer leave without pay. “But do your homework first,” says Michaels. Research temporary replacement costs, plan your break during your job’s downtime if possible, then present your leave proposal from a business perspective, convincing your supervisor she’ll benefit by getting a newly invigorated you. **NO TIME.** Just can’t get away? Read *Clarity Quest: How to Take a Sabbatical Without Taking More Than a Week Off* (Simon & Schuster), by Pam Ammondson, which charts an eight-week program to renew your energy and reduce your stress even while you’re working.—B.L.

SOURCE: CREATING YOUR LIFE COLLAGE: STRATEGIES FOR SOLVING THE WORK/LIFE DILEMMA, BY KATHY McDONALD AND BETH SIRULL (THREE RIVERS PRESS)