

# BUSINESS OF LAW

EDITED BY REGINALD F. DAVIS / REGINALD.DAVIS@AMERICANBAR.ORG



## Short Term, Big Benefit

Secondments grow as a better-life option by Hollee Schwartz Temple

Work-Life  
Balance

Kevin Boland recently found sophisticated legal work and better work-life balance in a place that would surprise many attorneys: a temporary legal job.

**LEILA KANANI:** Secondments can avoid resumé gaps and keep lawyers current in case they want to return to full-time employment.

◀◀ Last fall Boland, 54, a patent attorney who focuses on fluoropolymer technology, was looking for a position that would cut down on his two-hour-plus daily commute. He hoped to find cutting-edge work closer to his Wilmington, Del., home, in part because his triplets were about to graduate from high school and he didn't want to miss the milestones.

With the help of a secondment firm, which provides talent to meet temporary hiring needs, Boland found the right match with E.I. du Pont de Nemours and Co.'s legal department.

A growing number of U.S. companies are hiring secondment firms to find high-caliber attorneys for short-term assignments, according to Deborah Epstein Henry, who co-founded the secondment firm Bliss Lawyers in 2011. The companies get experienced attorneys without having to make a long-term commitment, says Henry, who placed Boland in his position. And because secondments offer an uncommon mix of high-level legal work and predictable hours, attorneys get a work-life boost.

"Predictability is very closely aligned with work-life satisfaction," says Henry, 45, of Philadelphia. "And here, the attorney is in control."

Bliss Lawyers employs lawyers in seven states, working on-site for clients in industries from telecommunications to health care to financial services. The average engagement lasts about a year.

**SWITCH TO SECONDMENT**  
**Fears about work-life fit convinced Leila Kanani** to abandon BigLaw and pursue a secondment business of her own. An intellectual property lawyer with a decade of experience, Kanani watched as senior members of her firm worked punishing hours that kept them from their families.

"That was not the life I wanted to live," says Kanani, 34, who founded Intermix Legal Group in Chicago last fall. She notes that before the secondment model took off, attorneys seeking improved work-life

conditions didn't have many options, often choosing to "leave the legal space." But now, she says, "firms have realized that they can get quality work done for cheaper than hiring someone full time if they're willing to be more flexible."

Attorneys working for Intermix often work from home, and for lawyers who would have suffered professionally from resumé gaps, secondments can "keep them current in case they want to return to full-time employment," she says.

The model has been very popular with mothers re-entering the profession after a career break, Henry adds. Ten percent of her placements have been re-entry moms.

Since Mae O'Malley started her San Francisco-based secondment business—Paragon Legal Group—in 2006, she has seen the model grow steadily. O'Malley, 40, has begun speaking to California law students to make sure they know secondment work is an option that can provide better work-life fit. Because secondments often favor transactional practice, she advises new lawyers to take that into consideration when making early practice group choices.

While secondment work can be unpredictable and firms can't guarantee year-round employment, the work-life benefits have far outweighed the negatives for O'Malley, a mother of three elementary school-age children. She plans her workday so that she can manage her kids' after-school activities, shutting down in the late afternoons and returning to her computer after their bedtime.

And over the past six years, more than 300 attorneys working for Paragon have experienced similar benefits because they can establish child care arrangements that don't require constant juggling, she says.

"Within the legal industry, being able to have a 9-to-5 job is a rare thing," O'Malley says. "This allows a flow from work to life that is very reasonable compared to what is usually offered." ■

*Hollee Schwartz Temple is the co-author of Good Enough Is the New Perfect.*

# Making Law New

**Tech geeks gather to reinvent the law**  
by Rachel M. Zahorsky



**THEY GATHERED WITHOUT TIES OR ADHERENCE** to a

century-old model for legal services. Instead, those in the crowd of tech geeks at the Computer History Museum in Mountain View, Calif., were linked by their goal—leading a law revolution.

Forty speakers presented their visions of future law at ReInvent Law, a daylong conference in Silicon Valley in March. Led by Michigan State University law professors Dan Katz and Renee Newman Knake, the fast-paced event alternated between six-minute slideshow presentations and longer, 15-minute talks designed to teach, inspire and promote changes that will redefine the construction and delivery of legal services.

And given the significance of a conference held in Google's backyard, greater open and affordable (or free) access to information was also a common thread.

"Lawyers are regulated to the point where it stifles innovation," Knake told the *ABA Journal*. "There is a resistance among educators that if lawyers give away too much information, people won't want their services."

For the computer programmers, academics, entrepreneurs and venture capitalists at ReInvent Law, the future of legal practice includes Apple Store-inspired legal retail outlets where law concierges readily answer questions and pair consumers with local lawyers. Gone will be the days when individual cases are largely viewed as unique fact sets: Litigation will be driven by massive data collections that guide strategy and predict outcomes. And that information won't be amassed