

## Stats still dismal for women lawyers

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The statistics leaped out at me: “Women have made up 40 to 50 percent of law-school graduating classes for 25 years, yet they are still only 16 percent of law-firm equity partners.” So how is it that decades after women’s liberation, the statistics for women are still so dismal?

Deborah Epstein Henry, Esq., the author of “Law and Reorder: Legal Industry Solutions for Restructure, Retention, Promotion & Work/Life Balance,” does more than just worry about the statistics. The Main Line resident set out to do something to improve the situation.

Not only did she write the book “Law and Reorder” but she started a national consulting firm, Flex-Time Lawyers, LLC, to teach law firms how to manage talented women attorneys. And she advocates for women in the workplace all the time.

Epstein Henry has lots of experience juggling work/life issues, as she and her husband have three children, she has worked as a litigator, and still she found time to do a lot of research and write her book.

Her latest book launch happened last week at the Philadelphia Bar Association, with a noontime panel, featuring Epstein Henry and moderator Lynn Doyle, host of Comcast television’s “It’s Your Call.” After Doyle finished interviewing the author about the state of the legal profession these days and the role that women lawyers play or are forced to play, the other panelists chimed in and the audience was allowed to ask questions.

The panel was billed as “Legal-Industry Trends and the Future of the Profession,” and it featured prominent legal observers: JoAnne Epps, the dean of Temple University’s Beasley School of

Law; Abe Reich, co-chair of Fox Rothschild and past chancellor of the Philadelphia Bar Association; and Carol Ann Petren, executive vice president and general counsel of Cigna Corporation.

The session was co-sponsored by the Bar Association's Large, Mid-Size, and Solo and Small Firm Management Committees; the Women in the Profession Committee; and the Bar-News Media Committee. You know the topic is important when, despite ice and snow, there is a huge turnout, and Rudy Garcia, Chancellor of the Bar, shows up and stays for the entire discussion.

Epstein Henry has had several other book launches before coming home, including a session at Skadden Arps in New York City, where a noted New York Times reporter interviewed her before an audience of 200 attorneys.

The topics discussed at the event were the threat to the billable hour, the rise of new models of legal practice, the morphing of large law firms, the development of talent-management strategies and the creation of work/life and women-friendly employers.

I spotted Liz Brown, Esq., another Lower Merion resident, in the audience. Liz, who had matriculated at an out-of-state law school, praised Temple's Beasley School of Law and Dean Epps for incorporating practical skills, along with the philosophy of law, into the curriculum. Dean Epps talked about the challenge of balancing practical business skills with the intellectual training necessary to be a qualified lawyer.

When Epstein Henry threw out the statistic that 31 percent of all women lawyers leave the profession, Abe Reich was astounded. He said that strong measures must be taken if one-third of your professionals drop out of the profession. He confessed that his work/life balance choice was to keep every appointment with his kids' pediatricians. But he also pointed out that if a lawyer chooses to participate in his or her children's lives, the price to be paid is working night or weekend hours.

It became obvious to Epstein Henry that the work/life issue was profound when she first issued an e-mail invitation to women lawyers to come to a brown-bag luncheon discussion of the topic. When 150 people responded, she knew she was onto something.

I got a chance to ask the lawyer-author and the rest of the panel if the "Mommy Track" prejudice against professional women still exists. Carol Petren, the Cigna general counsel, said she insisted that when her attorneys are on vacation, they resist the urge to tweet or e-mail and just relax. But she, as well as the other panelists, all agreed that prejudice against women attorneys is still ingrained in most law firms. And technology, while useful, can become an obsession.

But Epstein Henry's book is really a blueprint for restructuring career paths, for finding ways that women can re-enter the profession or at least re-register on the career track if they take time off to have children and raise them.

And if the pages at the beginning of “Law and Reorder” with high praise for male and female executives is any indication, Epstein Henry has produced an invaluable tool for women and employers. A must-read for law students, too.

One of the endorsers of the book is Ellen Galinsky, the president of the Families and Work Institute, who just announced a joint project with the Society for Human Resource Management to explore workplace flexibility and effectiveness. Since Galinsky is friendly with Epstein Henry, you can bet that “Law and Reorder” will be one of the tools used in this multi-year study. What do they say – find a busy woman if you need the job done right? Just ask Deborah Epstein Henry – she can quote you chapter and verse! Just Google [www.lawandreorder.com](http://www.lawandreorder.com) and find out for yourself.

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