

ASSOCIATES PAGE

Recalling Summer Days Can Make You A Better Mentor

BY MOLLY PECKMAN

Special to the Legal

Old Man take a look at my life.

I'm a lot like you were.

Old Man, look at my life — Twenty-four and there's so much more ...

Summer associates make me feel old. They look younger every year — perhaps because every year is that much further from when I was a "summer." It was 10 years ago when I went to Phillies games, barbecues and concerts. And it was 10 years ago, when, overwhelmed about my summer assignments, I first realized the value of a good mentor.

Love lost, such a cost.

Give me things that won't get lost.

Like a coin that won't get tossed ...

Rolling home to you.

The best mentors give their summer associates "the things that won't get lost," like navigational tips to avoid the same pitfalls some of us fell into when we were just starting out.

Since the summer is only halfover, it is not too late to reach out and offer practical advice to your summer associates. Candid feedback about writing early on can shape a lawyer's life forever. It took me years to silence (almost) the passive voice that echoed throughout my writing. When I review the memoranda of my summertime friends, I remember my own mistakes.

Ten years ago, I often ended up lost in my research after making a wrong turn, following a bad lead or not knowing when to stop. I then felt compelled to recount my missteps in the memorandum I was preparing. One of my mentors taught me to stay focused on the question presented, to explain my answer, to defy the urge to retrace my steps and to ditch the legalese.

Offering up effective feedback requires advance thought. Telling someone he or she cannot write is of no use. Rather, helping that person become a better writer is one of our jobs as summer associate mentors. Provide your summer protege with samples so he or she knows the proper format for a document. Offer constructive criticism, reinforce what the summer associate did right and suggest alternative ways to communicate more effectively.

Old man take a look at my life.

I'm a lot like you.

I need someone to love me the whole day through.

Oh one look in my eyes and you can tell that's true ...

Mentor continues on 8

Which Comes First? Firm or Family?

Associates With Kids Struggle to Bill Hours and Still Be Home for Dinner

BY JO PIAZZA

Special to the Legal

Many associates say they and their peers are putting off child-rearing until achieving certain career goals, an endeavor that has become more difficult in the past five years with the increase in associate billable-hour requirements and the competition to make partner.

According to the 2000 Survey of the Profession conducted by the Philadelphia Bar Association, the number of practicing young lawyers with children has declined since the last survey results were tabulated five years ago. In 2000, 30 percent of associates polled in Philadelphia had children, a 6 percent decrease from 1995.

"Increased salaries mean a lot of expected billable hours," said James Elam, a young lawyer with a lot to balance as a father of two boys, an associate at Dilworth Paxson and the chairman of the Young Lawyers Division of the Bar Association.

"We are expected to be at the firm more, and if you have kids, you just want to get home to spend time with your family before they go to bed. A lot of technology has made it possible to put in your time at the office and then go home and finish up work after your kids have gone to sleep or on the weekends."

For those associates who do choose to have children earlier, the balance between work and family has to be rearranged. Advances in technology and a greater understanding from firms have made the parental path a little easier in a number of ways. At the same time, the increase in the number of women in the workforce — legal and others — means fewer full-time moms, putting a strain on both parents to rearrange their schedules.

EASIER NOW?

Two decades ago, there were fewer women in the legal profession, fewer child-care options and a lack of support for young parents from employers.

"I would say it was harder 20 years ago," said Mary Platt, a longtime partner with Montgomery McCracken Walker & Rhoads. "There were fewer women in the profession and, as a result, fewer role models for women lawyers who were interested in developing business. There was less mentoring of women lawyers than there is today, but now with the increased emphasis on billable hours, it's more difficult today



ELAM



JOSEPH



HENRY



HAMMER

to find time to devote to developing business.

"So overall, I would say that it was difficult 20 years ago, and it remains difficult today for different reasons."

Finding more flexible ways to get the work done is becoming a requirement for both men and women associates who opt to have children early in their careers.

AN ASSIST FROM TECHNOLOGY

E-mail, conference calling and the versatility of Intranet-based company files have made creating a schedule inclusive of family, work and leisure simpler. A good deal of work can be done from home, making life easier for both men and women associates who want to leave the office in time to spend time with their children before bedtime.

"I think people also frequently do things like work from home to the extent that there are things people can do at home after the kids go to sleep," said Sharon Buckingham, director of associate development at Pepper Hamilton. "As long as you're working with people who are flexible, it tends to work out."

But no matter how flexible an employer may be, some duties are non-negotiable. Elam, whose wife remains in the home to care for their children, finds that juggling his family's needs with the demands of a large firm can be taxing.

In February, Elam's practice called him to Los Angeles for the Grammy awards. His client, Jill Scott, was nominated for three awards. Elam is also representing several up-and-coming acts in the Philadelphia area, a task that requires a great deal of his time. These demands put Elam in a position in which finding time to spend with his family must be placed at a higher level.

"I try to make it high-quality time, basically," Elam said. "I try to make sure my weekends are free even though there are lots of things I need to and should do on weekends, but I try to blank that time out

for my family. On those days, I spend a lot of time with my kids and a lot of time with my wife."

For many associates, especially new mothers, the needed balance can be reached through a part-time or a flex-time schedule, an option many associates contemplate when they make the decision to have children.

Lisa Salazar, mother of two girls and part-time partner with Hoyle Morris & Kerr, has opted for a four-day workweek, working full time and taking off Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. She has found that it is easier to spend four days in the office rather than try to split her time between her work and her kids five days a week.

For that one weekday out of the office, she can devote her time to school activities and committees.

"Devoting an extra day a week to my family gives me the extra time that I need as a mother," Salazar said. "The kids really appreciate that there is at least one day a week that I am there when they get home from school."

According to Marla Joseph, chairwoman-elect of the Young Lawyers Division, new technology, coupled with the desire to retain well-trained and loyal associates, has led many firms to be more flexible with lawyers who wish to create a flex-time or part-time schedule for whatever reason, including pregnancy and child-rearing.

The benefits of being a flexible employer are many, with retention ranking the highest on the list.

Hope Hammer, mother of two and seventh-year associate with Duane Morris & Heckscher, agreed with Joseph.

"I certainly think there are benefits to the firms in having women around who have trained with them for years and know their clients well, women who would otherwise leave because of family options," Hammer said.

"The more flexible you are, the better for Firm or Family continues on 8

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Firm or Family

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everybody. Associate turnover is so great that the more firms can do to keep the people they trained, the better it is for everybody."

Hammer began working an 80 percent schedule after her first child was born two years ago. This meant a 20 percent cutback in everything, including pay and billable hours. The way the hours were reduced was up to her, suited to her and her family's needs.

Similar schedules are becoming increasingly popular. With most day-care facilities that close at 6 p.m., there is a rush to get out those office doors at 5:15. To be able to switch to a schedule that ends the day an hour earlier, associates are forced to better manage the time they have in the office.

"I think it makes you a very productive lawyer," Hammer said. "I sit down at my desk and do my work and don't stop. I don't really waste any time."

An 80 percent schedule is acceptable at many firms, but not all.

"We just placed someone with a major firm on an 80 percent basis," said Sandy Mannix, a legal recruiter with Abelson Legal Search. "She has been out for a while with children, but she had wonderful credentials. A lot of firms were not interested. At 100 percent they were interested, but at 80 percent, no."

If some firms won't even hire lawyers wishing to work a flex-time or part-time schedule, how lenient will they be in promoting part-time associates to partner or allowing existing partners to go on a part-time schedule?

That question depends on the size of the

firm and oftentimes on the practice group. Large firms can often afford to be more flexible because they have more attorneys to spread work among — a luxury smaller firms don't always have. But at big firms, the competitive culture may make a parent hesitant to request a reduced or flexible schedule.

"I'm taking three months off for maternity leave, and I happen to be the entire workers' compensation department," said Joseph of eight-attorney Sacks Weston Smolinsky Albert & Luber.

At a small firm, Joseph said, the "planning horizon" for a break like hers is much broader than it would be in a large firm.

"It's not like I can just take off for three months," said Joseph, who had to spend a lot of time preparing for the leave. "Bigger firms have larger departments, making it easier to divide up a workload. At the same time, a smaller firm may be more flexible with hours."

DERAILING PARTNERSHIP?

Large firms also have a larger pool from which to choose partners. Both men and women who elect to spend more time with their children have less time to spend on client development, which can hinder their chances of making partner.

Platt believes that some firms, Montgomery McCracken included, are looking for the business development potential but understand the need to wait for an associate's lifestyle to settle into a comfortable groove.

"We make partners of women and of men who are highly skilled," Platt said. "In our firm we look for people who have the potential to develop business when we make them partners, but they don't have to show the results of that at any single point in time."

Practice area also plays a role in the ease with which a working parent can manipulate his or her schedule. Specialties that seldom have an absolute deadline, such as trusts and estates, are often easier for the working parent to handle than a practice, such as litigation, that demands strict deadlines and frequent court appearances.

Juggling children's schedules along with the firm's remains daunting. But for many, the benefits seem to far outweigh the cost. Many young lawyers today seem to be able to do it all. Next year, Joseph will balance her time between the new baby and her new position as chairwoman of the Young Lawyers Division.

"You run for chair-elect the year before, and I honestly almost didn't do it," Joseph said. "I thought about it, and then I kind of figured the whole point of the Young Lawyers Division is to make life easier for young lawyers, and who better to do that than someone that is balancing a family and the things important to young lawyers?"

This theme resonates in monthly meetings of a group of Philadelphia flex-time lawyers. During the research for this article, Deborah Epstein Henry, who formed the group, was expecting her third child any day. At meetings, the group, which has nearly 150 members, discusses a topic that is unique to working parents.

"The typical dilemma among the women in the group is not being fully received by either faction — the working community or the stay-at-home moms," said Henry, an associate with Schnader Harrison Segal & Lewis. "But in many ways it is also the biggest bonus. We are able to work and stimulate ourselves as lawyers but also play an active role in the home." ■