

# Law360

## Top Firms For Women Offer Work-Life Balance

By **Erin Fuchs**

Law360, New York (August 11, 2009) -- A survey released Tuesday on the “ 50 Best Law Firms for Women” features firms—including [Sidley Austin LLP](#), [WilmerHale LLP](#), [Jenner & Block LLP](#) and [Foley Hoag LLP](#)—that offer lawyers flexible hours and other options to achieve work-life balance, a goal experts say has fallen by the wayside amid the recession.

Flex-Time Lawyers LLC and Working Mother Magazine, which jointly conducted the survey, touted 50 firms' policies as “ leading the charge for change,” listing both big-name firms and some smaller ones.

The survey took into account firms' flexible-hour and reduced-hour policies, as well as the number of women in leadership roles at the firms, among other factors.

I think law firm management, many think that the war for talent is over and that lawyers are essentially just lucky to have a job, Flex-Time founder and President Deborah Epstein Henry said. “ I think more lawyers are reticent to raise work-life issues for fear of jeopardizing their job security.”

But, Henry added, “ I'm confident that the tables will turn again.”

She said that as the lessons of the recession inspire firms to make permanent salary cuts, in order to remain competitive more firms will adopt the work-life balance policies that make the top 50 so female-friendly.

There's a dearth of talent on the horizon as baby boomer lawyers begin to retire, but firms will exercise more caution when it comes to throwing money at new recruits, Henry said.

I think it's going to be that much more important for firms to entice their talent through culture and environment, she said.

The winning strategies among the top 50 include [Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP's](#) progressive return program” for women attorneys returning from maternity leave. The program allows women to return from maternity leave on an adjusted schedule with a reduced workload.

The program gives women who might be reluctant about rejoining the work force the opportunity to ease back into work at their own pace, said Ira Rosenstein, Orrick's partner in charge of alternative work arrangements.

This type of program may encourage them to try it out when they're not sure. Some of them will find that they can do it—that it does afford the balance they need or desire,” Rosenstein said.

Another firm, [Smith Moore](#) Leatherwood LLP, which serves the Southeast, allows its lawyers to create their own flexible working plans.

Working mother Molly Huggins, for example, works a reduced workload from her Savannah, Ga., home. I do my part to make it work, the firm does its part, and everybody wins,” she said, according to the survey.

Jack Zaremski, founder and president of Hanover Legal Personnel Services Inc., agreed that giving lawyers the chance to live their own lives outside work benefits both them and the firm —especially during a recession.

It's intuitive that firms will operate more efficiently and more effectively not only by improving their own economics," Zaremski said, " but also by providing environments in which their own lawyers can be healthy and which allows for attorneys to maintain and have satisfying lives outside of the practice of law."

Still, he said, firms have been focusing mostly on maintaining their economic viability during the recession.

The next step in getting firms to being healthier places is to start addressing and focusing more on the area of work-life balance," Zaremski said. "It's something that we cannot neglect to do in the long run."

The vast majority of female lawyers seeking his assistance in making a lateral move almost immediately ask whether firms provide flexibility so that they can take care of their families, Zaremski said.

But that flexibility should apply to all workers, including men who want to take care of their children and lawyers who want time to pursue their outside-of-work passions, he said.

Zaremski pointed out that he has taken the time to participate in five Iron Man Triathlons, the fifth one taking place in Japan.

The more we can move flexibility away from being a 'mommy's issue,' the better off we'll be, said Henry, who also is a lawyer and mother of three sons.

The 50 Best Law Firms for Women survey took applications from 105 law firms in 2009, its third consecutive year. The survey gathered information not only on family-friendly policies, but also on female representation among leaders at the firm, the development and advancement of women, and compensation, among other factors.

The 50 winners, which were not ranked, had an average female equity partnership of 20 percent versus a 16 percent average nationwide, while 8 percent of lawyers in the top 50 on average worked reduced hours, versus 5 percent nationwide.

[Steptoe & Johnson LLP](#), which also made the list, takes a balanced approach to recruiting and promoting women, from dinners for female lawyers to ensuring that women get the experience they need to excel, said Sandy Chamblee, the firm's chief diversity partner.

We need to take care of our women attorneys, and we need to help mentor them into really, really good lawyers, Chamblee said.