

The National Jurist

October 2009
Best Law Firms for Women

There was a time when money and salaries were a huge part of enticing talent at law firms nationwide. But what used to be is no more, said Deborah Epstein Henry, founder and president of Flex-Time Lawyers.

I think that firms are going to be much more cautious about using money to entice new talent or retain talent, Henry said.

Working Mother magazine and Flex-Time Lawyers, a national consulting firm advising the legal profession on work-life balance and the retention and promotion of women, published a list of the 50 Best Law Firms for Women in its 2009 August/September issue.

In the magazine, industry experts said that the recession has created a greater focus on work-life balance and will be a key in recruiting and retaining future employees, especially working mothers.

According to the Center for Work-Life Policy, 42 percent of women lawyers leave the profession at some point in their careers.

The recession has created a shift in the legal industry and now is the time to push through mutually beneficial, cost-effective reforms that directly benefit work-life balance and allow working moms to succeed both at home and in the court room, said Carol Evans, president of Working Mother Media.

Each of the 50 Best Law Firms for Women employ more lawyers who work reduced hours (8 percent versus 5 percent nationwide) and female equity partners who share in their firms profits (20 percent versus 16 percent nationwide) than the national averages for firms.

We are proud of our 2009 Best Law Firms for Women because they understand that when the market improves, the war for talent will return and they will be better positioned to recruit and retain the best and brightest, Henry said. Big salaries and bonuses will no longer be the pivotal means for firms to draw the best talent, and culture and environment will become more important ways for firms to distinguish themselves.”

The applicant findings showed that 98 percent of the firms commit to helping more women make it to partner by hosting networking groups for female lawyers. Sixty-eight percent mentor senior female associates and 62 percent offer management training to teach women the skills they need to advance.

I think a significant issue for these firms is that a huge talent pool applying are women, Henry said. These are [firms] that are recognizing this issue. These are firms that are really learning that they need to change the way that business gets done.”

Firms with at least 50 lawyers were eligible to apply for the list, and the application for the ranking included questions about issues concerning retention and promotion of female lawyers. Ranked firms were selected based on their workforce profile, family-friendly benefits and policies, flexibility, leadership, compensation, advancement and retention of women.

It really remains to be seen for the 2010 initiative whether those numbers will hold with the economic downtown, Henry said.

From the October 2009 issue of The National Jurist by Michelle Weyenberg, associate managing editor.