

# Chicago Daily Law Bulletin

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## 6 firms here ranked as 'best' in nation for women lawyers

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Six law firms with headquarters in Chicago have made Working Mother magazine's 2008 list of the 50 "Best Law Firms for Women."

The firms cited by the magazine, which released the survey results Tuesday in conjunction with the consulting firm Flex-Time Lawyers LLC, are Baker & McKenzie LLP; Chapman and Cutler LLP; Jenner & Block LLP; Katten, Muchin, Rosenman LLP; Neal, Gerber & Eisenberg LLP; and Sidley, Austin LLP. Other firms based elsewhere that have Chicago offices also made the list.

To identify candidates, the magazine accepted applications from firms that employ at least 50 lawyers.

The firms that made the final list were selected based on their responses to 400 questions related to the percentage of women that the firm employs and at what levels; policies regarding child care, parental leave and insurance; the ability to work flexible or reduced hours; the leadership, compensation and advancement of women in committees and practice groups; and retention programs.

All of the firms that made the top 50 say lawyers who work reduced hours are nonetheless eligible for non-equity partnership.

"To not let them do that is going to be a permanent impediment to a woman's success," said Deborah Epstein Henry, president of Flex-Time Lawyers. "It may be on a delayed track, but if their work is partner material, then they should be elevated to partner. It's an equity issue. We're not asking for preferential treatment."

The magazine has been sent to law schools, so second-year students can review the results before they interview with recruiters, who visit campuses this time of year, Henry said.

For the Chicago-based firms, the rankings revealed the following:

- Of the 26 practice groups at Baker & McKenzie, four are led by women, and a woman sits on the eight-member management committee. In addition, three women became non-equity partners between 2003 and 2007 while working reduced hours.

Fathers who have at least a year at the firm can take up to five weeks' paid paternity leave, and nine did that last year. The firm offers 13 weeks' paid maternity leave.

- At Chapman and Cutler, a woman sits on the five-lawyer compensation committee, and two women serve on the eight-member executive committee. In terms of earnings, two women ranked among the top 10 percent at the firm between 2005 and 2007.

As for the road to partnership, associates who have finished two years can choose one of two tracks to be eligible. They can log either 1,850 or 2,000 billable hours each year, and the only difference is in base pay. Attorneys on either track need 8½ years to be considered for partnership.

That perk is appreciated by associates and potential recruits, said Suzanne L. Shier, a Chapman and Cutler partner who chairs the firm's diversity committee.

"It demonstrates to them our commitment to be a law firm that is competitive. ... We are more attractive to those highly qualified students because of the flexibility that we offer. These young men and women who are looking for an employer ... they're making really informed decisions about their careers," Shier said.

- Jenner & Block offers management training for female lawyers every quarter. Last year, the firm held eight networking events for women lawyers and female clients.

Additionally, one-third of the management committee consists of female equity partners. Fifteen of 39 committee leadership posts are held by women.

- Katten, Muchin, Rosenman has six women lawyers holding 50 department leadership posts, and the highest-paid equity partner is also a mother.

The firm also created an online program for female attorneys exclusively to build professional relationships within the firm and with clients.

- Management at Neal, Gerber & Eisenberg elevated six female attorneys to non-equity partner between 2003 and 2007 while they worked reduced hours. Four female non-equity partners who worked reduced hours also were promoted to equity partner during the same period.

The firm also spends about one-fifth of its business development budget on networking events for women.

- Sidley, Austin lawyers may work reduced hours and can take time off after working on complex cases or deals that are negotiated into the night.

The firm also has an informal mentoring circle that pairs female associates with more experienced women lawyers. The Women's Committee holds seminars for new women

lawyers to help them advance, and the Mid-Level Associates Conference hosts an annual event for fifth-year associates to discuss advancement strategies.

In all, 115 firms applied to make the list this year. That's an increase from last year, when 85 applied.

The survey revealed that the amount of time allowed for parental leave increased among the firms that made the list. The average number of weeks given for maternity leave was 14 in 2007, compared with 12 weeks in 2006. For paternity leave, the average offered by the top 50 firms was 5.77 weeks in 2007, a jump from 4.6 weeks in 2006.

Regardless of whether a firm makes the list, those that apply receive a scorecard showing where they rank against the aggregate data in various categories. Firms also can purchase a more detailed report that splits rankings based on firm size and geographic region.

Of the 50 firms that made the list, 98 percent of them host networking events in which women lawyers meet clients; 68 percent offer mentoring to senior female associates; and 62 percent offer management training for women who want to lead committees or practice groups.

The report is in the August-September issue of Working Mother and online at [www.workingmother.com](http://www.workingmother.com) and [www.flextimelawyers.com](http://www.flextimelawyers.com).