

A Woman's Place Is... At Cravath

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This week, *Working Mother* magazine, in association with *Flex-Time Lawyers*, released its second annual **Best Law Firms for Women** rankings.

Some of the firms on this year's list are notorious sweatshops, more likely to help women **freeze their eggs** than they are to aid either sex in raising a family.

I contacted **Deborah Epstein Henry** (pictured), founder and president of *Flex-Time Lawyers* and co-author of the list. Henry said that her results reflect more than firm PR. The rankings score firm programs based on how many attorneys actually use those programs.

In Henry's view, ranking the best law firms for women is more than just a women's issue.

"What we are looking for is firms that have work/life policies that are both gender- and ~~racial- [sic]~~ reason-neutral," Henry said. "I firmly believe that the more we can move work/life issues away from being a 'mommy's issue' the better off we'll be."

More on Henry's efforts to make law firms responsive to lifestyle concerns after the jump.

To put it simply, Henry did not pick the top 50 firms out of a hat.

To be eligible for the rankings, law firms are asked to submit an "application" consisting of answers to nearly 400 questions. The survey is broken down into five sections: 1) Workforce Profile; 2) Family Friendly Benefits and Policies; 3) Flexibility (in terms of hours); 4) Compensation, Leadership and Advancement; and 5) Retention of Women. The workforce profile, flexibility, and advancement sections are weighed more heavily than others, and the firms' responses are processed according to a proprietary algorithm which yields the rankings.

You'll notice what is missing from Henry's methodology: PPP, prestige, the things that **Vault typically cares about**, are not part of the equation.

Those omissions are not accidental. Henry believes that her rankings give firms information about the effectiveness of their own policies that is not available anywhere else. Whether they make the list or not, all of the firms that participate receive an issue-by-issue breakdown of where they ranked.

"Firms are really poised, and many of them ready, to start devoting resources to work/life and women's issues," Henry said. "But they don't even know their strengths and weaknesses."

Information exchange sounds great, but Henry also thinks that the rankings can bring about real change in the legal industry.

"One of my goals," she said, "is making work/life balance and women's issues the basis for competition among law firms, as historically has been the case for salary."

Godspeed.

[2008 50 Best Law Firms For \[Working Mother\]](#)