

10 N.Y. Firms Listed as Best for Women

[By Thomas Adcock](#)

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Roughly half of the law students across the country presently involved in on-campus interviews have a personal stake in this question: Exactly which large firms are best for women?

Conveniently, the second annual survey by Flex-Time Lawyers and Working Mothers Magazine was released Tuesday, listing the nation's top 50 shops in terms of work-life balance, mentoring opportunities for women, retention of female attorneys and family accommodation - career choice factors of special concern to women, who for the past decade have averaged a few points more than 50 percent of all law school graduates, according to the National Association of Law Placement.

Ten New York-based firms were named among this year's Flex-Time/Working Mothers top 50, four of which also made last year's inaugural list.

"It's my mission to make this survey an instrument of competition among the firms, an instrument of change," said attorney Deborah Epstein Henry, president of Flex-Time, a national consulting firm with offices in New York and Philadelphia. Particularly during the current recruiting season, she added, "Firms know they need to be on the list."

As one measure of competition, Ms. Henry noted, the number of firms responding to this year's survey increased by 29 percent over last year, which she claims now makes it the "ultimate recruiting tool" in attracting women lawyers.

The 2008 survey of 115 firms with 50 or more attorneys - up from last year's survey of 85 large firms - asked 400 questions in five categories:

- Work force profile including numbers on women partners and associates;
- Family-friendly benefits and policies;
- Work schedule flexibility;
- Leadership, compensation and advancement of women;
- And retention of women.

Raising a family while working within the "billable hour system," said Carol Evans, chief executive officer of Working Mother Media, does not allow women "to advance in their careers."

To compete for the allegiance of half the young lawyers now in the profession, she said, "law firms will have to make fundamental shifts in their policies."

Some of that shift is well under way. The survey found that 98 percent of the top 50 firms host regular networking programs for women lawyers, 68 percent offer mentoring for senior female associates and 62 percent offer management training for women attorneys. Virtually all firms surveyed have some manner of flexible and part-time work schedules, paid parental leave and outreach programs that include women attorneys who opt to stay home during their children's formative years with help in maintaining bar association memberships and CLE credits.

Outside the City

In addition to 10 local law firms named among the nation's top 50 firms for women attorneys by Flex-Time Lawyers and Working Mother Magazine, these made the list:

Andrews Kurth, Houston; **Arent Fox**, Washington, D.C.; **Arnold & Porter**, Washington, D.C.; **Baker & McKenzie**, Chicago; **Bass, Berry & Sims**, Nashville, Tenn.; **Bingham McCutchen**, Boston; **Bricker & Eckler**, Columbus, Ohio; **Chapman and Cutler**, Chicago; **Covington & Burling**, Washington, D.C.; **Dorsey & Whitney**, Minneapolis; **Farella + Martel**, San Francisco; **Fenwick & West**, Mountain View, Calif.; **Foley Hoag**, Boston; and **Folger Levin & Kahn**, San Francisco.

Also, **Fox Rothschild**, Philadelphia; **Gibbons**, Newark, N.J.; **Gray Plant Mooty**, Minneapolis; **Heller Ehrman**, San Francisco; **Hogan & Hartson**, Washington, D.C.; **Honigman Miller Schwartz and Cohn**, Detroit; **Hunton & Williams**, Richmond, Va.; **Ice Miller**, Indianapolis; **Jenner & Block**, Chicago; **Katten Muchin Rosenman**, Chicago; **Kutak Rock**, Omaha, Neb.; **Lindquist & Vennum**, Minneapolis; **Littler Mendelson**, San Francisco; and **Manatt, Phelps & Phillips**, Los Angeles.

Also, **Miller & Chevalier Chartered**, Washington, D.C.; **Morgan, Lewis & Bockius**, Philadelphia; **Morrison & Foerster**, San Francisco; **Patton Boggs**, Washington, D.C.; **Perkins Coie**, Seattle; **Shook, Hardy & Bacon**, Kansas City, Mo.; **Steptoe & Johnson**, Washington, D.C.; **Vinson & Elkins**, Houston; **WilmerHale**, Washington, D.C.; and **Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati**, Palo Alto, Calif.

Local firms cited as best for women in both years' surveys - Cravath Swaine & Moore; Debevoise & Plimpton; Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison; and Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom - have long maintained corporate cultures that affirm Ms. Henry's mission, perhaps best personified by the experience of Debevoise partner My Chi To.

"When I was considered for partnership [in 2005] I was pregnant," said Ms. To, who assumed her condition would delay promotion for about a year. "But my colleagues said, 'No, that's not relevant. We think you're ready.' That was my first surprise."

On her return from maternity leave as a new partner, said Ms. To, "I decided I wanted to work part-time. A couple of partners who had been on part-time schedules or who were still on part-time told me to just go speak to [presiding partner Martin Frederic Evans]. I had a 10-minute conversation with Ric and he told me, 'That's great.' I said, 'That's it? Shouldn't there be negotiations?'"

When Kayalyn A. Marafioti joined Skadden 27 years ago as an associate, she said she was "thrilled to see other women lawyers walking around the hallways. Just seeing that is so important."

Ms. Marafioti had lateraled from a small Wall Street firm where she was the lone female attorney.

"Nobody at Skadden cared that I was a woman," said Ms. Marafioti. "I never felt that kind of thing. I might have felt it in outside meetings, or in courtrooms, but never at Skadden."

Alfred D. Youngwood, the chairman of Paul Weiss, said his firm has a "deeply held commitment to the advancement of women," evidenced by female partners on the scene in the 1950s.

Beyond female representation at his firm's highest ranks, said Mr. Youngwood, Paul Weiss aims to "foster professional development, encouragement, promotion and mentoring" for women by such policies as infant-care facilities, paid paternal leave time (20 weeks for women, 10 for men), emergency child care, networking groups and part-time work schedules.

Married to a stay-at-home father, Cravath partner Rachel G. Skaistis has not needed to make use of her firm's part-time opportunity. But she often spells her husband by taking the couple's three young children to the firm's on-site child-care facility on weekends.

On returning from parental leave, she said, Cravath lawyers and support staff pay nominal daily fees for six months, after which the center is free of charge.

Among the newest initiatives that benefit Cravath lawyers with young children is the Working Parents Group, which meets monthly for lunch at the firm's expense to discuss matters of mutual interest: the increasingly complicated matter of schools, both private and public; how to balance work with family life; and shared knowledge of child-rearing.

Bumped Firms

Six New York firms were bumped from this year's list: White & Case; Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman; Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe; Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel; and DLA Piper. Some media officers at those firms complained of 2008 survey questions that differed from last year's survey in format and weight factors, skewing their scores negatively.

Judith M. Mercier, a Holland & Knight partner and chairwoman of her firm's Women's Initiative, said she was unable to answer a number of this year's questions simply because the firm did not track the requested data.

A Pillsbury spokeswoman said her firm did not participate in this year's law firm survey. However, she added, the firm is a participant in a separate survey by Working Mother Magazine that measures all U.S. corporations, law firms included. Results of the corporate survey are set for release next month.

Timothy B. Goodell, a White & Case partner who heads his firm's Women's Initiative, said he was "disappointed" with this year's survey results but remains "proud of the strides we have made in recent years" in support of its women lawyers.

Promotion Ratios

This year's Flex-Time/Working Mothers survey noted partnership promotion ratios, which Ms. Henry said may be the first such statistical study. Among the top 50 firms, she said, 37 percent of associates promoted to non-equity partnership were women while 29 percent of those made equity partners were women.

Promotion numbers for women are "considerably higher" than Ms. Henry expected, given the most recent American Bar Association study of the male-female partnership ratio among the nation's largest 250 law firms. That study, made in 2000, put women at merely 16 percent of all partners. The top 50 firms in Ms. Henry's study showed a female equity partnership ratio of 19 percent - a 3 percent increase over last year.

Another measurable improvement, by Ms. Henry's lights, was shown by firms granting additional paternity leave to its male lawyers, and a parallel increase in men taking advantage of such leave.

According to the 2007 survey, 88 percent of the top 50 firms offered an average of 4.6 weeks' paid paternity leave; this year, those numbers grew to 90 percent and an average of 5.8 weeks' paid leave. Last year's survey showed that 62 percent of new fathers availed themselves of paternity leave, while this year the number ballooned to 83 percent.

Parental leave, said Ms. Henry, "is no longer just a mommy issue."

Despite these and other bright spots, Ms. Henry said the legal profession lags behind others in terms of social progress.

For instance, women constituted 75 percent of lawyers who took advantage of their firms' part-time work policies, said Ms. Henry. Men, she said, "still face a significant stigma" for doing likewise. And job-sharing arrangements, she said, remain a rarity in the legal world, including among the top 50 firms in her survey.

"We've deemed it acceptable to enable doctors to step into one another's shoes," said Ms. Henry. "Yet at the same time, we've said, 'Oh, lawyers couldn't possibly do that'" because clients would have to pay more for additional counsel.

"Really, though," said Ms. Henry, "there must be ways of designing [attorney] job shares so clients aren't charged more."

On Sept. 15, Ms. Henry and Ms. Evans will host two events in New York in connection with the survey: a morning "Best Law Firms for Women Forum" at the Merkin Concert Hall, followed by a luncheon at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel. (See www.flextimelawyers.com for details.)

Until then, all 115 firm participants in this year's survey will be sent a confidential "scorecard" informing them of how they measured up to ideals stated by the survey sponsors. A more detailed "benchmarking report" is available to firms for \$5,000.

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