

**Programs help female lawyers return to work force**  
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**By Joyce Gannon, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**

Female lawyers who leave demanding careers to raise children or care for family members might want to jump back in to their profession a few years later but often don't feel confident enough or prepared to return to the practice of law.

Although it's an issue that's left many female lawyers searching for answers, there are signs that the legal industry is beginning to take steps to tap into a vast female talent pool they've largely ignored, said a legal consultant who specializes in work-life balance issues and the retention and promotion of women attorneys.

"There's really a buzz going on about how to use this untapped talent," said Deborah Epstein Henry, founder and president of Flex-Time Lawyers LLC, and a former commercial litigator. Ms. Henry, whose practice is based in Philadelphia and New York, will moderate a panel discussion in Pittsburgh Tuesday on how women lawyers can successfully move on and off the career track.

The event, "Just a Detour: Tips on How to Off- and On-Ramp Successfully" is sponsored by the Pennsylvania Bar Association Commission on Women in the Profession and includes a reception in honor of state Supreme Court Justice Debra Todd. The panel includes Jack Barbour, attorney with Pittsburgh law firm Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney; Eileen Buck, attorney with the state Superior Court; Susan Dobbins, attorney with the state Supreme Court's Office of Disciplinary Counsel; Lisette McCormick, executive director, Pennsylvania's Interbranch Commission for Gender, Racial & Ethnic Fairness; and Christina Gill Roseman, attorney with Philadelphia-based law firm Kimmel & Silverman.

About 42 percent of female lawyers nationwide take time off from their careers apart from their maternity leave during the course of their careers, Ms. Henry said. On the average, they stay off the job for three years, she said.

Among the biggest issues they face in returning, she said, is lack of confidence in their own skills and anxiety -- especially among women with children -- about flexibility at law firms and other workplaces.

"I encourage them to negotiate flexibility" with potential employers and to "anticipate the challenges" at specific firms and corporations before they agree to work there, said Ms. Henry.

She noted that at least two law schools, Pace Law School in White Plains, N.Y., and the University of California Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco, have developed programs for women who want to return to work. The American Bar Association and local bar associations also have launched initiatives that target women who have left the profession and "want to get up to speed," Ms. Henry said.

Some law firms also have begun to develop re-entry policies for "talented alumni they could potentially recruit back."

With women comprising about half of all law school graduates, "this issue has to be at the forefront of law firm management," she said.

For more information and registration, go to [www.pabar.org/public/committees/womenprf](http://www.pabar.org/public/committees/womenprf) and follow the link to meetings. Joyce Gannon can be reached at [jgannon@post-gazette.com](mailto:jgannon@post-gazette.com) or 412-263-1580.