

Large Firm Management Committee

The Case for Flex-, Part-Time Attorneys

by Jeff Lyons

The key to successful flex- and part-time lawyering for both attorneys and law firms is, well, flexibility.

The issue of flex- and part-time lawyering was discussed in depth at the June 27 meeting of the Association's Large Firm Management Committee.

Deborah Epstein Henry is a part-time attorney and of counsel at Schnader Harrison Segal & Lewis LLP. She said the issue of part-time work is "a very pressing issue a lot of us care deeply about." Henry led the discussion along with committee chair Jeremy D. Mishkin, managing partner at Montgomery, McCracken, Walker & Rhoads LLP.

"People who are willing to be flexible are much more attractive. And just because we're part-time doesn't mean we're not available. We are as available, if not more available, than full-time attorneys," she said.

Henry is the founder and chairperson of Philadelphia Flex-Time Lawyers, a group of nearly 250 lawyers who work a flexible and/or reduced schedule. She has garnered press coverage

for her work in this area from National Public Radio, *The National Law Journal*, *Working Mother* magazine and *The Pennsylvania Lawyer*. She has also started a Web site for her group, www.flex-timelawyers.com. Next month, she will launch New York Flex-Time Lawyers.

Henry said that 35 percent of all attorneys across the nation are part-timers. The figure is slightly higher in Philadelphia, with 43 percent of part-timers and 5.1 percent of associates calling themselves part-timers.

Henry's group is predominantly made up of women. "Of the 250 people on our mailing list, only two are men."

Flexible and part-time hours are attractive to women once they start families, Henry said. But she said the issue of splitting time between children and the office is the most stressful to handle.

The idea of having part-time lawyers, Mishkin said, is completely counter-intuitive to what a law firm is. "A law firm makes its living by billing lots of hours. An economically rational law firm would say 'why should we hire someone who leaves at 5 p.m. when we can have a full-timer?'" But Mishkin said the most intelli-

gent and thoughtful law firm managers are not hour markers. "Good legal advice we are being paid for can come from someone who isn't in the office 24 hours a day, seven days a week," he said.

Mishkin said there's a silent cry of a generation of women who say they don't feel like they're giving 100 percent to either their kids or their law firm.

Timothy W. Callahan, executive partner at Saul Ewing LLP, said part-time attorneys bill 75 percent of the hours that full-timers do. "But in working 75 percent of the hours, costs are not reduced. We still have to pay the rent, heat and electricity."

"But if you find a candidate for a position who's 'got it' and can get along with everyone, you're going to stretch for them to make them happy," Callahan said.

Jeffrey M. Lindy, chair of the Board of Governors and a sole practitioner, said hiring a candidate has everything to do with the bottom line.

"Each of us brings something of value. There are firms out there that

are willing to make part-time work for them," he said.

Henry said she doesn't mention to clients that she's a part-time attorney. "Virtually none of my clients know about it unless they see it in the press. To them, it's no big deal."

She says she still manages to bring in business, but not in the traditional method of taking a client to a ballgame. "I connect with people outside the office, at my preschool and at soccer games," she explained.

Jane L. Foster, the managing partner at Stradley Ronon, said she started out as a part-time attorney right out of law school.

"Women have choices that men don't have," she told the committee. "We need to do a better job early on finding out about the needs of women so we don't lose women who are working part-time."

"There needs to be a way for part-time lawyers to advance, otherwise you'll lose good people," added Henry. "Part-time work is not for everyone. It's a choice that people make. It's a very personal decision," said Mishkin