

# New York Law Journal

Volume 4, Number 2  
April 2005

MAGAZINE®

**DIVERSITY** | IN ACTION

## Do They Work?

Part-time **partnership** tracks and **visually impaired** associates.

**BY KATHERINE FRINK-HAMLETT**

**I** am a mid-level corporate associate at a New York law firm and recently returned from maternity leave after the birth of our first child. Balancing motherhood and the practice is proving to be a challenge. There never seem to be enough hours in a day, and competing demands are an ever-present reality. I don't want to leave my firm but something has got to give.

I've heard rumblings about part-time associates and would seriously like to consider this option. However, I do not want to take myself off of partnership track since I've invested a great deal of time and effort in my career. While I realize that being a mother will require some major changes, I don't want to completely compromise my career aspirations.

There's been some general discussion of part-time associates who remain on track, but I'm skeptical. Are law firms truly embracing the so-called part-time partnership track or is it mostly theoretical?

---

Katherine Frink-Hamlett, a graduate of New York University School of Law, is president of Frink-Hamlett Legal Solutions, Inc. and can be reached at [katherine@frinkhamlett.com](mailto:katherine@frinkhamlett.com).

It's a little bit of both and mostly, the former. Keep in mind that the idea of a part-time associate remaining on partnership track and becoming a part-time partner is truly a revolutionary concept for most New York law firms, and, indeed, for most major law firms.

Part-time partnership track is an embryonic concept with sparse precedent, so naturally firms will require some time to figure out how to make it work for their infrastructures, their associates and most importantly, their clients. Law firms that have made part-time partners or have formal policies enabling this work style deserve a huge round of applause because this method for delivering legal services to demanding corporate clients is a drastic, and potentially risky, departure from the traditional model.

While I wholeheartedly support the part-time track as a crucial mechanism for retaining talented and



mostly female attorneys, I also recognize that there are numerous logistical considerations. Apparently, Torys and its first part-time partner, Alison D. Bauer, were able to overcome the challenges and make the part-time track a success story.

Alison was a part-time associate in the firm's bankruptcy department and was recently named partner in the New York office (go girl!). Alison's journey to her position is chock full of useful information for associates seriously considering the part-time track.

Alison suggests that you set realistic goals, maintain flexibility and most importantly, identify the right person to initiate your discussions. This advice holds true whether or not your firm has a stated part-time policy.

Don't seek out the partner who works 24/7 with little balance between work and home. In light of these own personal and professional choices, this partner will probably not be sympathetic to a request for a part-

## DIVERSITY | IN ACTION

time track. However, the partner (male or female) who manages to get to the swim meet every now and then, and makes a conscientious effort to have meaningful family time, is a better choice.

Ideally, the person you speak with should also value you and your work and have a high level of confidence that you are an asset to the firm's agenda. Sure, it helps to be a superstar, but being a valued associate who consistently produces a solid work product is also persuasive.

In Alison's case, she negotiated her part-time status when the department from her former firm went over to Torys. She was pregnant at the time and as part of her negotiations, she requested that she remain on partnership track, albeit on a delayed schedule. The firm agreed and the rest, as the saying goes, is history.

When approaching the part-time track issue, emphasize that your reduced schedule does not translate into a reduced commitment to the firm. Be sensitive to the firm's needs by setting realistic parameters and maintaining flexibility.

Let's face it: corporate clients have legitimate and pressing needs that have absolutely nothing to do with your quest for a balanced life. So whether you are part-time or full-time, accessibility is fundamental to creating a seamless relationship vis-à-vis the firm's clients. While technology is a tremendous enabler in this process, resist the temptation to make it a substitute in every instance when you may be unavailable. Develop delegation skills both at home and in the office and be prepared to accept the inevitable fact that there will be

occasions where you'll need to be available on your scheduled day off. However, be wary of schedule creep: the undesirable tendency of work to expand beyond designated time slots.

Remember, the part-time track is still in the experimental phase and the kinks need to be ironed out. So congratulations on the baby, and good luck with your negotiations!

**I** am a partner at a mid-sized but fairly progressive law firm in New York. We have attorneys who work remotely and some staff on part-time schedules, and have enlisted contemporary methods for retaining quality professionals. We are looking to add to staff and I recently received a referral from a colleague. Here's my issue: the referred attorney is visually impaired, so I have my doubts about bringing him in for an interview and I'm feeling a little guilty about it. Is someone without sight truly able to practice in a law firm setting?

Absolutely! Don't beat yourself up about being doubtful—your concerns are completely understandable. It's difficult to comprehend how visually impaired attorneys function in a discipline that is so dependent upon the review and manipulation of documents. But yes, they are uniquely able to function in a law firm setting.

Ronald M. Enriquez is in private practice and also sits as an Administrative Law Judge for the City of New York. As a visually impaired practitioner, he explains that many blind attorneys understand that they are operating in a world where their colleagues may not readily accept their incorporation into the law firm setting, and they also appreciate the

limitations that others may impose. However, he emphasizes that because of their personal challenges, many blind attorneys potentially make excellent legal practitioners.

By virtue of their visual impairment, blind attorneys are painstakingly detailed when processing legal matters. Additionally, they tend to be extremely dedicated and loyal employees since few firms are willing to hire them. Ron suggests that you may wish to do some online research before meeting with the candidate so that you get a better idea of some of the technological tools available to visually impaired attorneys.

For example, they can scan legal documents into specialized computers that reproduce the documents through speech output. The American Blind Lawyers Association can provide additional information as to the logistics of their practice resources.

In your case, since some of your current legal staff are already working remotely, you could accommodate a visually impaired attorney in a similar fashion. Finally, be mindful that the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) has certain prohibitions as to types of questions that are permissible during an interview with a disabled candidate. My advice: bring the candidate in for an interview; you may find that your colleague has identified an extremely valuable addition to your firm. •

This article is reprinted with permission from the April 2005 edition of the NEW YORK LAW JOURNAL. © 2005 ALM Properties, Inc. All rights reserved. Further duplication without permission is prohibited. For information, contact ALM, Reprint Department at 800-888-8300 x6111. #076-05-05-0001