

## **The Mommy, Esq. Series:**

### **Part-time Work Arrangements: Panacea or Just a Pay Cut?**

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*After waking up for that 3 a.m. feeding, then again at 5 a.m. to squeeze in a workout before throwing in a load of laundry, wiping smeared something off your suit, and charging off to work, you come home late, tired and hungry; hardly ready to face it all again, thinking, "if only I could work part-time my life would be manageable!"*

You, and millions of other highly driven, results-oriented attorney moms like you struggle to get the A grade in both lawyering and mommying. Is part-time work the answer to achieving that balance?

Simply put, the answer is yes and no. Part-time work does provide the opportunity to keep your foot in the lawyer world while allowing you to still get that "A" in mommying. Many firms offer part-time work options, and for several attorney moms the choice to go part-time has been a blessing. For others, however, part-time work isn't viable either financially or practically, or has simply resulted in a pay cut without a corresponding decrease in work responsibilities.

To make a part-time arrangement work, you'll need to answer several questions. What are your personal expectations? Does your firm offer part-time arrangements that truly meet both your personal and professional goals? What does part-time status mean to your family, (i.e., will you be able to pursue that ever elusive "quality time" with your kids or will you now be responsible for all things related to the household?) How you answer these questions will determine whether your part-time arrangement will be a panacea or just a pay cut. Here are a few tried and true tips for managing the expectations of yourself, your work world and your home life.

#### **Your Personal Plan**

You recognize that you are accustomed to being the best, and you expect the best of yourself. You are probably wondering how you can get an A in both parenting and lawyering. You want to have it all. Therein lies your challenge in developing a realistic personal plan. The very first thing to do when developing a part-time work solution is to create your personal plan. Your personal plan is your vision and map for how you will handle the required shift from your automatic way of doing things to a specifically

designed role for yourself. It includes everything from managing perceptions at work and home to determining how you wish to behave and react in the variety of inevitable situations that could potentially sabotage the success of your part-time arrangement.

Going part-time is not the answer in and of itself...you will have to do some creative juggling to really make it work. No problem, you figure, because you have all sorts of great communication devices... you can be mommy and keep up with the office via laptop, blackberry, cell phone, and all the wonderful gizmos and gadgets that make it possible to work all the time, anywhere. However, you can't continuously do it all, and that is what successful part-time attorney moms truly understand and accept. You must alter your definition of what it means to "get an A." The pressure you feel is caused by your internal litany of what you think you should be doing. Having decided to go part-time, you have really decided to change your life. In order to succeed, you must truly be committed to making it happen on a daily basis and not let the bar slip.

You do not want to find yourself earning part-time pay and still coming home from the office at 9 p.m. every day. Define your own expectations and map out a part-time plan with which you are truly comfortable (i.e., comfortable changing your entire life to fit into that plan), and then find a way to implement your personal plan daily.

How do you go about doing that? Most importantly, be honest with yourself...is part-time work what you really want, or do you really want to continue working full-time yet simply have a modicum of flexibility? Your plan is your opportunity to identify what you want and need. The firm will have their policies, and somewhere between the structures in place at the firm and your ideal is where your part-time plan will evolve. But as with any lifestyle change, it is important to take a few minutes each day to prioritize your expectations of yourself. Come up with a daily mantra that can remind you of your commitment. Then cut yourself some slack.

Successful part-time attorney moms are able to let go of the "shoulds" that haunt them. They know when to say "no" to a 5:30 p.m. meeting or an overnight business trip. Many attorney moms also find that on a daily basis, the ability to "go with the flow" is critical. Along those lines, you can prepare by expecting that at least 3 things will completely frustrate you each day, so that when they occur you can manage your reactions. You have enough people pulling on you, making demands of you, and expecting you to cater to them first and foremost, that you can be your own best friend by not adding yourself to that list of folks who need you to do something NOW. Don't lower your standards, just elevate your

compassion for yourself.

## **Your Work Plan**

Equally important as your personal plan, is whether your firm or legal department offers and supports part-time work arrangements. If your firm does, what does part-time mean? In many firms, part-time may mean 40 hours a week, or your salary may be reduced based on a 50-60 standard workweek instead of a percentage of 40 hours. It also may be the case that the firm benefits may be reduced in proportion to your hours. Full benefits may only be available to employees who work in excess of 25 hours. The successful part-time attorney mom is intimately familiar with these details as they apply to her firm, and is a strong advocate for ensuring the implementation of those policies in her favor.

Take responsibility; once you have mastered understanding the policies on paper, you can direct your career and the firm to make the part-time policies work for you. Do not expect that your mentor or boss or the HR person will have your best interest at heart or will help you wade through the reality of your shift in hours. At the end of the day, you want to value the deal the firm is giving you, and not just feel like you're merely taking a pay cut to be with your kids.

Whether your boss is a partner, a general counsel, a managing partner, an executive committee, or the entire compensation committee, you must manage expectations persistently. Design a part-time plan that you can present to your boss to demonstrate how you will be able to meet and exceed job requirements on a part-time schedule. Map out a trajectory for advancement that is realistic with part-time hours. Be sure to emphasize your ambitions for advancement so that your boss can support you within the firm. You do not want to end up having "mommy" stamped on your forehead when partners are discussing the merits of the various attorneys in the firm. You can tell your boss and the powers that be that you intend to be evaluated on the merit of your work product and your contribution to the firm. Be sure to find out how you are expected to bill your time (or clock your hours) for the time you'll spend thinking about work issues while with your kids. Create an alliance with a powerful partner in the firm who can champion your advancement when you are not there to speak up for yourself.

Similarly, you don't want the powers that be in the firm to view you as less effective because you are less in the office. This will require you to show up more consciously than you might have until now. Be proactive about

getting face time with the partners and key clients. Step up your marketing and networking efforts and be sure to communicate with the firm what you are doing in these areas. Take on leadership roles in your firm or department. Be strategic about your actions...make every move count and practice shameless self-promotion! No one will just notice you, you must make them notice. This is particularly true when you are part-time because in many firm cultures part-timers are often seen as somehow part-effective, part-contributor, part-dedicated. You know this is not true, we know this is not true, and logically the firm knows it as well, but you must manage this perception constantly by learning to communicate your actions, successes, and efforts. Communicate your strategies for maintaining visibility with key clients and tell the firm (repeatedly if necessary) that you expect to continue working with high-profile clients. Ask to be considered for new opportunities often, so the firm does not automatically consider only full-time attorneys for the plum assignments or clients.

You also need to factor into your plan that your co-workers may have mixed reactions to your part-time situation. Some may consider you to be a slacker, others may treat you with disdain, yet others may applaud your choice! There is no need to feel pressure to manage the perceptions of all your co-workers, but in those teamwork instances where you are working directly with others, you must communicate openly with them about your part-time arrangement and what it means for your working relationship with them (i.e., what can they count on you for?) You can't have all your co-workers gleefully advocate your part-time status. Recognize and accept that some may be bitter and while you may be able to smooth over a few of those relationships, do not make yourself crazy trying to make all of your co-workers your allies. Choose your battles, and always err on the side of communicating your own expectations clearly and often.

In conjunction with your firm's policies, partner expectations and co-worker issues, client expectations will also need to be considered as part of your firm plan. You are already managing your clients' expectations in the course of the work you are doing for them. The shift to a part-time schedule, however, may render you less available or less responsive than you have been. Your clients will want to know they can still count on you to meet deadlines, to handle their cases, and to take care of them. Managing their perceptions and expectations is a simple matter of communication. Let them know what will and will not change as a result of your move to part-time hours. Set flexible boundaries, and communicate how you expect to be able to serve your clients given your new schedule. There will, of course, be occasions where you are unable to live up to your communicated intentions for client service. In these rare instances, be

sure to tell your clients as soon as you are aware that you need to extend a deadline or handle something slightly differently than promised. Re-affirm your commitment to the client, and apologize if necessary.

## **Your Family Plan**

Discuss with your spouse the financial impact of your going part-time, and any changes to childcare and household responsibilities which might ensue with your decision to work less hours at the firm. Make time to pre-determine with your spouse who will manage which household issues - not just the roles and division of labor, but who will handle the hiring and managing of those who support your household activities (i.e., cleaning service, babysitters, repair professionals, yard workers, etc.). Expect there to be debates about your work schedule versus your spouse's work schedule, especially if your spouse is working full time outside the house, and design a system or plan for how you both will deal with these debates when they arise. Expect a continual juggling act with kid-related errands, chores, and activities, but try to spend a few minutes a day with your beloved just enjoying each other.

Your spouse may assume (whether this expectation is communicated or not) that since you are working reduced hours at the office that you will handle more (most, all) of the household and child-related issues. This must be discussed in order to prevent feelings of resentment and discontent. Be sure to tell your spouse what you want and need. Take some time to identify what you expect of your spouse and be sure to share those expectations candidly. Ask for support, delegate tasks, make specific requests, and check in with your spouse frequently to see what his or her expectations are, if they are realistic, and if they are being met. Work together to devise systems for working as a team to take care of household business, family business, and still have time for each other and yourselves.

In addition to discussions with your spouse, talk to your kids about working part-time in a way that is appropriate for their age and understanding. They may simply need to know that mommy will be away from them for part of every day and that someone trusted will take care of them. This is particularly important if your new part-time schedule will require a change or a reduction in outside day care. Share with your children that you are making a decision to go part-time so you can be with them more. Emphasize that when you do go to work you will come home, and you are always reachable by telephone. If you will be working from home on occasion, set boundaries with your children about their behavior

and your expectations regarding noise, interruptions, and access to your attention.

It is good for children to know that healthy adults have more than one important role...in addition to being a parent, you are also an attorney, and both roles are special and important. Kids learn valuable lessons watching you juggle the demands of adulthood, and you can share with them what you like about your work to help them understand that you can be a better, happier parent by working part-time at the firm. Reassure them that it doesn't change how much you love them. Affirm their need to know that you miss them during the time you are away. Talk about going to work with confidence; this is what mommies do...mommies take care of kids and go to work. Let them know how they can help you and be sure to offer praise and encouragement for such tasks as bringing your briefcase to the car, fetching your blackberry or cell phone for you, turning on or off your computer, etc. At the end of the day, they just want to know that you missed them, you love them, and you are happy. You can best manage their expectations by spending time each day making them feel special.

Generally speaking, it is a great big balancing act, but then again, what isn't? The secret is to do your best work, be a great mommy, and think constantly of what messages need to be communicated to whom in order to manage the expectations of all those around you. Be proactive instead of reactive. When people struggle with a part-time schedule it usually has to do with an inability to identify and communicate expectations or manage relationships, and often is merely because those attorneys are functioning on autopilot rather than intentionally designing a workable part-time plan. Part-time can work for you, allowing you to have the best of both worlds, as long as you consciously create and implement strategies for handling the personal, work and family issues you will inevitably face in your quest for a work/life balance solution.

**Also see:** • [Job Sharing: The Alternative for the Executive](#) • [Exploring flexible work options](#)

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