

Finding Work-Life Balance

Don't live for the expectations of others at work and at home, said Malcolm S. McNeil of Carlsmith Ball LLP, in the Thursday program, "Work Life Balance: Pays!" during the ABA Midyear Meeting in Los Angeles. Instead, lawyers must be aware of their priorities in life and make sure their personal and professional endeavors support those priorities, panelists stressed.

"One of the biggest mistakes lawyers make is to let the profession, their clients and their firm make career choices for them," said McNeil.

In addition to McNeil, the session included Annalisa Checchi of Withers LLP; Par Remnelid of Vinge; Laura Farber of Hahn and Hahn LLP; Robin Sheldon of Fox Rothschild LLP; and Nina Marino of Kaplan Marino APC. Nancy Matos of Baker and McKenzie moderated.

Panelists shared stories about how they reached equilibrium between their personal and professional lives. Farber, for instance, made partner at 30, while also finding time for community activities and the needs of her family. She said making choices about how she spends her time—such as finding a law firm that supports her priorities and the ability to say "no" to projects when appropriate—helped her find balance in her life.

Sheldon suggested that lawyers take inventory of what is important to them and minimize the things that are not priorities. She recommended seeking supportive work environments, and said that many firms now offer flex time, job sharing and tele-commuting options. "If your environment isn't supportive of your needs, you don't have to stay," she said.

Several panelists challenged the notion that success is equated with high billable hours and a partnership track with a big law firm. Instead, success should be defined personally, after some self-evaluation—it's not one-size-fits-all, said Sheldon.

Lawyers who successfully balance the demands of work and home not only benefit themselves, but also their firms, panelists emphasized. According to Farber, firms attuned to the work-life balance needs of their associates have more effective, productive and happy employees who have better relations with their employers.

The program was sponsored by the Section of International Law and co-sponsored by the Young Lawyers Division, the Section of Criminal Justice and the Section of Science and Technology Law.



Panelist Annalisa Checchi discusses work-life balance issues with Jeffrey B. Golden, chair, Section of International Law



Panelist Laura Farber (right) says managing the expectations of clients and learning to say "no" are keys to finding work-life balance.

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