

Oklahoma County Bar Association



**INITIAL REPORT ON THE SURVEY:  
WORK/LIFE BALANCE IN THE  
LEGAL PROFESSION**

**APRIL 2003**

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## ***PREFACE***

What is work/life balance? Nationwide and internationally it is a phenomenon that has gained serious attention. Efforts to address work/life balance have proven to reduce the expenses associated with absenteeism, attrition, lack of productivity and ever-present health care costs. Work/life balance also is a means to attract and retain talent. People increasingly choose employment with work/life policies at the forefront of their consideration.

How does work/life balance fit within the legal profession? As the following Report shows, attorneys in our community recognize the importance of maintaining balance between professional fulfillment and meaningful personal lives. They seek ways to harmonize the competing demands of these goals. They also seek professional fulfillment through community and pro-bono contributions and promotion of civility among colleagues in the bar.

Addressing the need for work/life balance endeavors within the legal profession, American Bar Association Past President Robert Hirshon recently wrote:

Most of us were attracted to the law for the nobility of its principles; the rule of law and the peaceful resolution of disputes that is so essential for any society to flourish. But, if we endeavor to be a positive force in our nation's progress, we must also be good parents and good spouses, good friends and good neighbors. We must uplift those less fortunate. A lawyer, after all, is also a citizen. The noble life is a life of balance, with each obligation attended to. No responsibility should be completely sacrificed for the benefit of another.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Preface to *Balanced Lives: Changing the Culture of Legal Practice*, The ABA Commission on Women in the Profession, September 2001.

As lawyers we are often called upon to lead in the progress of society. As much as ten years ago, Professor Judith L. Maute of the University of Oklahoma College of Law recognized the need to address work/life balance in the legal profession and urged “the organized bar to take a leadership role in improving the quality of life in practice.”<sup>2</sup>

Let us embrace this call to action. Let us lead in the achievement of balanced practices. Let us be an uplifting presence both in the lives of those we serve and the lives of those we come home to each night. Let us be ever-mindful of the noble life our profession bestows by embracing the ideals entrusted to us as lawyers and striving for healthy and rewarding lives.

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<sup>2</sup>Judith L. Maute, *Balanced Lives in a Stressful Profession: An Impossible Dream?* 21 Cap. U. L. Rev. 797, 798 (1992).

## I. INTRODUCTION

In March 2001, the Oklahoma County Bar Association approved the formation of a Task Force to study work/life balance issues in the legal profession, in particular how these issues affect our practicing legal community. A major report issued by the Boston Bar Association (BBA) that same year, focusing largely on work/family conflicts in the legal profession, spurred the movement. The findings, reported by the BBA in *Facing the Grail*, indicate that attorneys increasingly make career and employment decisions based on their employers' policies and practices with respect to work/family balance, that attrition is related to an inability to perform at expected levels within a law firm while also addressing family care commitments, that attrition is economically detrimental and that addressing work/life balance needs of attorneys is economically sound.

Since the BBA's effort, several other institutions (including at least eight other bar associations) have begun studies of work/life balance in the legal profession. In 2001-2002, the American Bar Association issued two reports significantly related to this issue, *The ABA Commission on Billable Hours Report* and *Balanced Lives: Changing the Culture of Legal Practice*. Work/life balance was also a discussion topic at the ABA's 2002 annual meeting.

Because so many of the other studies have focused primarily on legal practice in large urban cities, our Task Force wanted to see whether the attitudes reflected there were the same in our community. In addition, our Task Force wanted to expand the focus from addressing work/family balance to broader issues of work/life balance.

At its formation, our Task Force created the following Mission Statement:

*Harmonizing Work/Personal Life Demands: A proposal to address the conflicting demands of professional success and personal pursuits within the legal profession.* We identified the following six goals:

- To provide an open and neutral forum in which to discuss the conflicting demands between professional and personal life choices and the need for work/personal life balance in the legal profession;
- To develop ways to identify and analyze existing sources of work/personal life imbalance;
- To consider, respect and incorporate the perspectives of all members of the profession on this issue, including law students, associates, partners and law firm management;
- To propose and develop innovative ways to create and foster work/personal life balance;
- To encourage and support the implementation of these solutions in the legal profession;
- To provide a resource of information on issues relating to work/personal life integration.

The Task Force then created a survey with the assistance of Professor Mahmood Shandiz, Ph.D., of the B.D. Eddy Research and Consulting Center at Oklahoma City University's Meinders School of Business.

The overwhelming response to the survey (with a return rate exceeding forty percent) indicates a sincere community interest in this topic. The following report details the findings of our study and includes insights we have garnered as this project has unfolded.

## **II. METHODOLOGY/CAVEATS**

The Task Force has operated with virtually no funding. We have pushed forward thanks to the hard work of the Steering Committee members as well as the generous donation of time and services of Dr. Shandiz, the B.D. Eddy Research and Consulting Center at Oklahoma City University's Meinders School of Business, and the Executive Staff of the Oklahoma County Bar Association.

Surveys were provided to members of our community by requesting attorneys, largely at law firms, to distribute the surveys within their firms. This eliminated the need to fund bulk mailings. The surveys were distributed with return envelopes marked "CONFIDENTIAL" and addressed to the Oklahoma County Bar Association. Anecdotally, we have learned that some law firm associates still did not participate in the survey out of concern that the confidentiality of their responses would be compromised.

The survey consisted of multiple choice questions designed to elicit information about demographics, firm policies and practices and levels of career satisfaction. Also, open-ended questions were presented asking respondents to give their views on five topics: likes and dislikes about their work in the legal profession; aspects of our profession that they would change if they could; barriers to achieving work/life balance; and ways in which workplace policies could support work/life balance. In addition, respondents were asked to identify issues or projects the Task Force should address in its efforts.

### **III. THE RESPONDING ATTORNEYS -- SAMPLING INFORMATION**

Most of the respondents are private practitioners working in mid- to large-size law firms. Forty percent work in large firms with more than fifty attorneys. Twenty percent work in corporations, for the government or judiciary, in law schools or in not-for-profit legal services corporations. Less than three percent of those responding are solo practitioners. The Task Force plans to further investigate perceptions and attitudes of the sole practitioners within our community and will target this group in a future distribution of the survey.

Over half of the respondents are partners in a law firm and nearly forty percent of the respondents are associates. Most people responding were between thirty and fifty-nine years of age, with the largest percentage (thirty-eight percent) being between forty and forty-nine years. Approximately one-half of the respondents were admitted to practice after 1986. The survey results, therefore, are inclusive of a range of experience levels among the responding attorneys.

The sampling accurately represents the gender composition of the Oklahoma County Bar Association with approximately one-third of the respondents female and two-thirds male.

Most respondents are married (eighty-two percent). In addition, over half of the respondents currently have children living at home (fifty-six percent). Our community, too, demonstrates the rise in dual career families. Overall, forty-three percent of the respondents have spouses who work full-time. Another sixteen percent have spouses who work part-time.

These characteristics of our respondents were considered as the results of the survey were analyzed. Correlations were drawn based on age, firm status (*i.e.*, associate or partner) and gender. Significant differences in survey responses based on these correlations are noted.

#### **IV. WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED**

Do practitioners in Oklahoma County comprise a “satisfied” bar? That depends. The respondents are overwhelmingly satisfied with their *work*. Eighty-eight percent reported so. The clear majority of respondents find their work interesting and challenging, are satisfied with the financial rewards and believe their work to be valuable to society.

When the issue of satisfaction was broadened, however, to encompass how attorneys considered their lives to “measure up to [their] general aspirations,” the numbers dropped to approximately one-half of the respondents, with one notable exception. The majority of attorneys past age fifty reported that their lives were exactly as they wanted. Does this mean younger attorneys should take heart that the profession is fulfilling and that their lives will get better? Or, has the practice of law, and/or the values of practitioners, changed from one generation to the next?

What are the priorities of the attorneys in our community? Interestingly, attorneys ranked family as their first or second priority. Spirituality was also a high priority, especially in the under thirty age group, where fifty-seven percent placed spirituality as their number one or two priority compared to thirty percent in the sixty to sixty-nine age group and thirty-

five percent in the fifty to fifty-nine age group. Where did work rank as a priority? Consistently, work ranked in second or third place.

Yet, despite this seeming satisfaction with the practice of law:

- less than half of the associates responded that they would like to remain in the practice of law for the rest of their working lives (compared to nearly sixty-five percent of the partners);
- nearly one-third of the associates and female respondents would not become a lawyer again (compared to one-fourth of the partners and male respondents);
- only half of the respondents would encourage others to go to law school.

What does this mean? The Task Force Steering Committee feels it may indicate the inevitable tension that results when devotion to the workplace (whether self-imposed, peer-imposed or employer-imposed) is viewed as the sole measure of a lawyer's success, at the costly sacrifice of a meaningful personal life. The following examination of attitudes toward core firm practices helps illustrate this tension.

## **A. The Work Environment**

### **1. *The Billable Hour***

Debates continue within the profession about the billable hour -- its pervasiveness, its relentlessness and the temptation to push the ethical envelope to thrive. Perhaps the centrality of this issue to our profession and to our community is best reflected, and indeed explained, by the fact that seventy percent of the attorneys responding agreed with the statement: "Success in my firm is defined by the number of hours billed."

Looking purely at billable hour expectations of law firms, our community appears relatively healthy, especially when compared to the 2000+ annual billable hour requirements often reported in the larger urban markets such as Dallas, Boston, New York and Chicago. Seventy-three percent of the private practitioners reported annual billable hour requirements of 1900 hours or less. Only eighteen percent of the private practitioners reported annual billable hour requirements in excess of 1900 hours, and only ten percent of the attorneys responded that on average, they devote sixty or more total hours (billable and non-billable) per week to legal work. Forty percent reported that number at fifty to fifty-nine hours. When comparing associates to partners, one-half of the associates work fifty to fifty-nine hours per week compared to one third of the partners.

But something more is reflected in our survey about billable hour expectations. Consider that to bill 1800 hours in one year, one must consistently produce thirty-five billable hours per week. That number does not incorporate time off for vacation, sick days, or personal matters (*e.g.*, doctors' appointments). It also does not include time spent contributing to bar activities, community service projects or pro bono work. Many lawyers expressed frustration with "lack of credit for any activity other than billing" and desired "more credit for being a well-rounded person in career advancement" and "recognition for their non-monetary contributions to the workplace environment."

In addition, many attorneys express dissatisfaction with the notion that quality of work is held in less esteem than quantity of work. Expressing the sentiments of many, one attorney

requested there be “more emphasis on [the] quality of representation” and “less emphasis on billable hours.” Other attorneys requested employers to recognize that “pro bono and community activities are also important.”

Can a law firm survive with reduced annual billable hour expectations? Many firms across the nation are experimenting with this and finding success. A report issued by the Project for Attorney Retention (PAR) in August 2001, *Balanced Hours: Effective Part-Time Policies for Washington Law Firms*, concludes:

Law firms, accounting firms and major corporations that have implemented effective balanced hours programs have benefitted from increased productivity, retention, staff and client loyalty, and bottom-line profits. In addition, they have found significant improvement in their recruiting efforts, attracting highly qualified applicants who are in search of balanced lives.

The *Balanced Hours* report includes a feature on law firms that have committed to balanced hours and found success. The report further dispels what PAR identified as seven common myths about the lack of economic feasibility of balanced hours:

- balanced hours attorneys cost firms too much money;
- some practice areas are not amenable to a balanced hours schedule;
- balanced hours cannot work in a high-powered law firm;
- lawyers who work balanced hours are not committed to the firm;
- client’s won’t accept reduced schedules;
- fear of floodgates: “the whole firm can’t work balanced hours.”

It seems easy to reject reduced billable hour expectations as unreasonable, unprofitable and unattainable. Nevertheless, closer examination reveals that even seemingly small (and by implication, certainly large) changes in firm culture can effect desired results. For example, perhaps attorneys need to focus more on how their day-to-day administrative decisions affect the bottom line. Our survey reflected that when making overhead decisions, consideration is *not* given to whether that decision will heighten the pressure on attorneys to increase their billable hours. Only twenty-five percent of the respondents factored these effects into the calculus, with the majority having no opinion at all. This is definitely something to ponder as pressures on firms continue to mount to consider balanced hours practices and alternatives to the billable hour. In fact, in response to the statement “I would like to work in a law firm that is structured so that lawyers could choose to bill thirty-five hours per week, on average and still be profitable,” over sixty percent of the attorneys agreed. Significantly, female attorneys showed particular interest in this alternative, with seventy-seven percent of them agreeing with the statement and a mere five percent not.

## ***2. Policies Impacting Work/Life Balance***

Can an employer, or law firm, help the individual attorney achieve balance? Views on this issue palpably diverge. Forty percent of the associates agreed that their employer could help reduce stress that impacts job performance compared to twenty-six percent who disagreed. Conversely, only twenty percent of the partners agreed that their employer could help reduce stress, with forty-seven percent of partners disagreeing.

Gender and age also play a role in this issue. Thirty-five percent of the female attorneys agreed that their employers could help reduce stress that impacts job performance. By contrast, less than one-fourth of the men agreed with this statement and nearly half of the men disagreed. Similarly, lawyers in the fifty to fifty-nine age group (fifty-eight percent) do not believe they can look to an employer to reduce stress. The under thirty lawyers were neutral, indicating they do not know whether employers can help reduce stress.

Almost half of the respondents (forty-seven percent) answered that their employer *values* balance, but a roughly equivalent number agreed that their employer does not do much to help lawyers *attain* balance. This attitude was particularly evident for lawyers in the under thirty age group and the fifty to fifty-nine age group. Comparing partners and associates, statistics were strikingly similar.

Attorneys were asked whether their firms have written policies about vacation, leave, part-time, flex-time and/or reduced hours. One-half of the practitioners reported that their firm has a written policy on vacation and leave. Over seventy percent reported no written policies about part-time, flex-time or reduced hours schedules. Interestingly, however, about sixty percent reported that these alternative work arrangements are available to support staff.

Alternative work arrangements, or as the study by PAR has phrased it, “balanced hours practices,” is the one area where gender plays the single most acute role in views about work/life balance. Eighty percent of the women reported no written firm policy regarding part-time work compared to sixty-five percent of the men. In a similar vein, twice as many

men as women believed their firm had a written policy on flex-time and reduced hours. Also curious is that fourteen percent more women than men believe that attorneys with alternative work arrangements can be considered for partnership.

Roughly half of the women responding would take a reduction in pay in exchange for fewer billable hours if doing so would not render them vulnerable to reduced esteem or impair their long-term career prospects. Similarly, nearly half of the women responding said they would also accept a longer partnership track if equally valued for the work they perform. Less than one-third of the women responding disagreed. Men's views on these issues were just the opposite. Only twenty-five percent agreed with these statements and one-half disagreed.

Nearly seventy percent of the women answered that they would be more committed to their firm or more likely to remain if work/family balance were really possible without personal or professional stigma or career jeopardy. Only fifteen percent of the women responding disagreed. Again the men's opinions reflected a difference in viewpoint, with only one-third of them agreeing with this statement. Interestingly, another one-third of the men were neutral on the issue, while the remaining one-third disagreed.

Eighty percent of the female attorneys disagree that alternative work arrangements adversely affect firm profitability compared to one-half of the male attorneys sharing this view. The statistics were similarly disconnected along gender lines when attorneys were asked whether allowing alternative work arrangements would "open the floodgates" to every

firm member seeking to reduce his or her hours. Eighty-five percent of the women disagreed while only fifty-six percent of the men disagreed. Over eighty percent of the female respondents also disagreed that lawyers with reduced hours “are not sufficiently committed to their legal practice,” while only fifty-five percent of the male respondents disagreed.

How do attorneys think clients feel about part-time practitioners? Nearly forty percent of the women disagreed that clients prefer working with attorneys practicing full-time, compared to only fifteen percent of the men disagreeing with that viewpoint.

Differences aside, attorneys overall do not perceive alternative work arrangements as a negative; they express openness to the possibility across the board. Indeed, most attorneys strongly disagree with the statement that: “Lawyers who work on a reduced hour basis or have a nonstandard schedule are not sufficiently committed to their legal practice.” Women just seem more willing to consider alternative work arrangements. This fact could be tied to the findings that fewer women have stay-at-home spouses (thirty-four percent) compared to men (seventy percent). Associates, too, are more likely to have a working spouse (one-half) compared to partners (one-third).

The desire for balanced hour alternatives also came through strongly in the responses to the survey’s open-ended questions. Many expressed the need for “flexible work arrangements,” “job sharing,” “part-time arrangements,” or “different tracks/compensation structures.” A significant number expressed concern, however, over the “stigma” associated with part-time or flex-time schedules and requested “more openness in the legal profession”

as to acceptance of these types of arrangements. As one attorney responded: “Flex time and part time [should be offered] with *respect, i.e.* partnership possible.” In addition, many expressed a need for alternative work arrangements with “reasonable compensation and benefits.”

Despite such strongly expressed sentiments, the reality seems to fall far short of the desire. The survey respondents indicated that less than ten percent of the attorneys in their firms have alternative work arrangements.

Numerous organizations, including PAR and the ABA Commission on Women in the Profession, have undertaken significant efforts at creating written policies for alternative work arrangements. PAR’s *Model Balanced Hours Policy* is attached as Appendix B to the *Balanced Hours* report and is available at [www.pardc.org/final\\_report.htm](http://www.pardc.org/final_report.htm). The Commission on Women in the Profession also has suggested policies which can be found in appendices to their report: *Balanced Lives: Changing the Culture of Legal Practice* at [www.abanet.org/women/balancedlives.html](http://www.abanet.org/women/balancedlives.html).

### **3. *Loyalty to Firms and to the Profession***

Most respondents would at least consider changing jobs. Here are some of the more commonly expressed motivators:

- more money;
- fewer hours;
- new/better challenge/opportunity;

- reduced stress;
- changed practice area or desire for a non-legal job;
- better/flex schedule (more free time);
- no hourly billing;
- avoid firm bureaucracy.

These responses at least suggest that embracing work/life balance issues and crafting meaningful workplace policies addressing these issues could improve retention of attorneys. Given the detrimental economic impact of high attrition, policies aimed to improve retention make business sense.

#### ***B. Attitudes about Work and Family***

Do attorneys believe that their life is balanced between work and family? When sources of imbalance and/or discontent are examined, differences are marked across age and position (*i.e.*, associate or partner) lines. Interestingly, gender does *not* play a significant role.

Notably, lawyers in the 30-39 age range are experiencing the most work/life imbalance and the most dissatisfaction with that state of affairs:

- fifty-one percent state they do not have enough time to spend with their families;
- forty-seven percent believe the demands of their work do not allow them to have a balanced life;
- forty percent feel that stress from their personal life decreases their productivity;

- forty-nine percent believe stress from their work has hurt the quality of their relationships with family and friends;
- forty-two percent believe their workload is too heavy.

One out of every four attorneys responding had, within the preceding six-month period, consulted a friend, family member or spiritual advisor about lack of work/life balance. Associates in law firms represented a slightly higher percentage, with one out of every three of them answering “yes” to having consulted someone about work/life balance. Most partners, conversely, (nearly eighty-percent) answered no to this question. Several attorneys expressed sentiments that “the importance of families should be emphasized” and that lawyers should be “encouraged to maintain healthy family relationships.”

### ***C. The Ethical Landscape***

As lawyers, we have an ethical responsibility to provide pro bono work. Rule 6.1 of the Oklahoma Rules of Professional Conduct provides:

A lawyer should render public interest legal service.

A lawyer may discharge this responsibility by:

(a) providing professional services at no fee or a reduced fee to persons of limited means or to public service or charitable groups or organizations;

(b) serving without compensation in public interest activities that improve the law, legal system, or the legal profession; or

(c) financial support for organizations that provide legal services to persons of limited means.

Okla. Stat. tit. 5, Ch. 1, App. 3-A. Sadly, most of the respondents answered that pro bono work is not encouraged, much less counted in annual billable hour requirements.

We should be proud, however, that the large majority of respondents (eighty-five percent) feel they are given a strong sense of legal ethics in their workplace. Indeed, lawyers voiced in strong unison their high regard for fellow colleagues within their firms.

Yet, lack of civility among colleagues outside practitioners' firms tirelessly reared its head in our survey. Phrases including "meanness of other lawyers," "backstabbing lawyers," "not being able to trust a colleague," "lack of respect among lawyers" and "lawyers who play games" were but a few of the numerous frustrations expressed in relation to the civility arena. In identifying changes that would improve the practice of law, the respondents from our community voiced the national consensus that increased civility among lawyers would improve both the public's perception of lawyers as well as lawyers' satisfaction with the profession.

#### ***D. Law School Debt***

Well over one-third of the respondents under the age of thirty-nine say that law school debt has affected the type of job they chose. According to a recent news article in *The Sunday Oklahoman*, salaries in the Oklahoma City area are low, particularly when compared to the legal market in neighboring Texas. The average beginning salary in Oklahoma City is \$50,000. In comparison, salaries for starting lawyers in Texas are typically between

\$115,000 and \$125,000. Nationwide, the median first-year salaries among firms of all sizes is \$90,000.

This difference in starting salaries might impact entering lawyers facing significant student loan debt. According to a recent ABA questionnaire, nationwide, debt for law students graduating from private law schools averages \$70,000 and from public law schools, \$43,000. Yet, according to the *Sunday Oklahoman*, lawyers stay in Oklahoma because of quality of life issues. They choose more balanced living over higher salaries. This may reflect an overall trend in employment decisions. USA Today published a poll in the fall of 2002 indicating that employees across all job markets place work/life balance as their number one priority in seeking a job. Oklahoma City firms should consider work/life balance as a meaningful negotiating point to attract and retain legal talent.

#### ***E. Lawyers' Health***

Statistically, lawyers are rated as the profession most plagued with depression, alcohol and drug addiction and stress-related illness. How does our community compare? One in every ten attorneys responded that they use prescription medication for depression or stress. When comparing associates' responses to partners', however, the statistics are disturbing. Twice as many associates responded "yes" to this question. Similarly, fifteen percent of the attorneys answered they use alcohol to excess -- with associates outnumbering partners by about three percent. Despite these numbers, seventy percent of the attorneys reported that

their law firms do not have procedures in place for assisting lawyers who suffer from drug/alcohol impairment or other stress-related impairments.

Less than ten percent of the attorneys responded they had consulted a mental health professional in the past six months. Yet, several attorneys requested that the Lawyers Helping Lawyers program be expanded to address mental/emotional health rather than just substance abuse issues. Attorneys in our community should know that the Lawyers Helping Lawyers program does offer screening and referral services for a wide variety of mental/emotional health issues.

A desire of the Task Force is that as awareness of work/life balance issues increases, statistics relating to addictive disorders, mental health problems and stress-related illnesses decrease.

## **V. RESPONSES TO OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS**

While the statistical information from the survey questionnaire is revealing about our legal community's attitudes, equally telling information appeared in the open-ended section of the questionnaire.

Attorneys' likes about the practice of law are easy to identify and the responses strikingly common including:

- the intellectual challenge and diversity of work;
- the opportunity to help others, to be of value to society and to make a positive impact on important issues;

- the ability to work with interesting and intelligent people: other lawyers, coworkers, colleagues, judges, opposing counsel and clients;
- the financial rewards;
- the respect associated with being a lawyer.

Less common but still prevalent responses include the flexibility and autonomy allowed within the practice of law.

The dislikes are also fairly predictable:

- other lawyers described as: unethical, rude, mean, unprofessional, overly aggressive, selfish, greedy, pompous, dishonest, incompetent;
- billable hours/keeping track of time;
- stress: constant time demands, long hours, constant pressure to perform, constant conflict;
- public dislike for lawyers and lawyer jokes.

Judges were also the subject of “dislikes” about the practice of law. Attorneys included in this section remarks such as incompetent and/or unprepared judges, uncivil judges, judges lacking private practice experience and the inadequate resources of state judges.

When asked to identify changes that would alleviate or at least address the dislikes, the following comments were commonly received:

- eliminate the billable hour/reduce the emphasis on the billable hour;
- promote more ethical behavior/increase civility;
- improve the public’s image of lawyers.

The most often cited barrier to achieving work/life balance is the emphasis on the “bottom line” and billable hour expectations. Workloads, a “culture of workaholism” and the inability to work part-time and be compensated fairly, were also commonly cited.

Many respondents identified workplace policies that could support work/life balance. Among the more common responses were the previously discussed requests for alternative work arrangements. In addition, many attorneys requested more “family friendly” attitudes and policies, the flexibility to care for sick children and/or personal matters and “on site” daycare. Another fairly common, but somewhat surprising response requested sabbaticals or “liberal” time-off and “mandatory” vacations. Respondents also requested education and increased awareness in the workplace about work/life balance issues and approval and encouragement from their employers to have “fulfilling personal lives.”

In this section on workplace policies attorneys also focused on billable hour issues. Many requested reduced billable hours while others requested management to focus on decreasing overhead so as to alleviate billable hour demands. Many also voiced the need for credit to be given to non-billable, work-related time.

## **VI. SUGGESTIONS/GOALS**

The members of the Oklahoma County Bar Association had varying views about this Task Force and its efforts. Some endorsed and embraced it, telling us that “this is a very important project – keep up the good work!” Another viewed the project as “social engineering” stating: “The OCBA shouldn’t have a task force on work/life balance. The

OCBA can't through social engineering create happiness." Some noted hesitant optimism about the possibility for meaningful changes in the legal profession, asking: "How can lawyers make it all work?" Others were content to leave things as is -- "I don't see any of these things changing because quite simply they cannot be changed -- this is life -- right?" Mirroring this sentiment, one person stated: "I don't think lawyers in private practice can achieve work/life balance. It's like the priesthood -- you give something up." Still others expressed a need for work/life balance to embrace single attorneys as well as attorneys with families asking us to recognize that "balance problems exist not just for those with children -- all professionals need balance to maintain health and sanity." And one person expressed a lot with this succinct statement: "Look critically at what we have become."

Though clearly divergent views exist, the emerging sentiment is a real desire for quality work to be acknowledged and rewarded and for the pursuit of balanced living to be respected and tolerated. As one lawyer put it, "encourage the quality of life vs. the quality of wealth accumulated." Many other lawyers expressed a desire for the following to be valued: community service, families, honesty, and civility. One lawyer suggested we devise and publish a rating system for Oklahoma law firms, including a work/life balance score, for distribution among law schools. In the corporate world, such rating systems are now common and companies emerging in the "top 100" flaunt their work/life balance policies to prospective employees.

One attorney expressed the desire that we “increase public discourse on the subject, at local and state levels.” This attorney has expressed the primary goal the Task Force identified at its inception and this survey has been one means to accomplish that goal. The survey results are rich with useful insights about the needs and desires of our legal community, but as important as the survey itself are those follow-up questions it poses. We look forward to the many opportunities that lie ahead to continue to foster dialogue on work/life balance.

## **VII. WHAT LIES AHEAD**

Attorneys in our community have asked us to:

- publish the results of our survey;
- hold sessions with firm management personnel to discuss the survey findings;
- encourage policies that support balance;
- deal with the disillusionment of young attorneys;
- publish articles on work/life balance;
- address the dangers of workaholism; and
- disclose work/life balance issues with the profession.

These are some of the many suggestions given to us. With the survey complete, the Task Force is excited to begin its next phase of supporting work/life balance initiatives.

*For additional copies of this report, please contact the  
Oklahoma County Bar Association.*

## WORK/LIFE BALANCE RESOURCES

*Facing the Grail*

Report of the Boston Bar Association Task Force on Work Life Balance  
[www.bostonbar.org](http://www.bostonbar.org)

*Balanced Hours: Effective Part Time Policies for Washington Law Firms*

The Project for Attorney Retention  
[www.pardc.org](http://www.pardc.org)

*Balanced Lives: Changing the Culture of Legal Practice*

The American Bar Association Commission on Women in the Profession  
[www.abanet.org/women/balancedlives](http://www.abanet.org/women/balancedlives)

The ABA Commission on Billable Hours

2001-2002 Report  
[www.abanet.org/leadership/billhours](http://www.abanet.org/leadership/billhours)

*An Empirical Study of Associate Satisfaction, Law Firm Culture, and the Effects of Billable Hours Requirements*

Susan Saab Fortney  
Texas Bar Journal -- December 2001 (Part One)  
-- January 2002 (Part Two)

*Balanced Lives in a Stressful Profession: An Impossible Dream?*

Judith L. Maute  
21 Cap. U. L. Rev. 797 (1992)

*Transforming Practices: Finding Joy and Satisfaction in the Legal Life*

Steven Keeva

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