

## **Best practice series: Work-life balance and alternative schedules**

Work-life balance isn't the first phrase that springs to mind in many legal settings. We asked some firms with innovative policies in this area to share with the [Managing IP Women in IP Network](#) how they are leading the way for their lawyers.





Mitra Janes

## DLA Piper

### Mitra Janes, Diversity and Inclusion Manager

At DLA Piper we recognise and appreciate the significant benefits of agile working. New ways of working have spread rapidly over the last decade, driven by the demands of the 24/7 economy and technological advances. Our clients expect us to provide quality services when they need them. People are looking to achieve a balance of career aspirations with other responsibilities. These shifting trends have created new challenges and opportunities for us. We have therefore launched a new approach to managing flexible working within the firm called agile working.

We developed two comprehensive guides, for partners and for employees. The partner guide explains the common agile working options, provides practical advice on how to handle requests, dispels the myths relating to agile working and provides client perspectives on agile working. The guide is complemented by tools for exploring the business case and developing individual work plans. The guide for employees also provides real life examples of agile workers within DLA Piper and explains the recommended approach for submitting a flexible work request. We have agile workers, both male and female, at all levels within the firm. We have also engaged with specialist recruitment and consultancy providers to provide support for the successful introduction of some new flexible working arrangements within the firm.

We believe our approach to agile working is vital in attracting and retaining the most talented individuals. We are delighted that our proactive approach to agile working has been recognised by our clients, with one of our banking sector clients commenting: "We have had a very positive experience of DLA Piper's approach to flexible working because those working flexibly remain committed and responsive to our needs. The service is seamless and people are always contactable, with appropriate cover in place if required. It has worked well for several years and we commend DLA Piper's promotion of flexible working within the organisation".



Dori Hines

## Finnegan, Henderson, Farabow, Garrett & Dunner

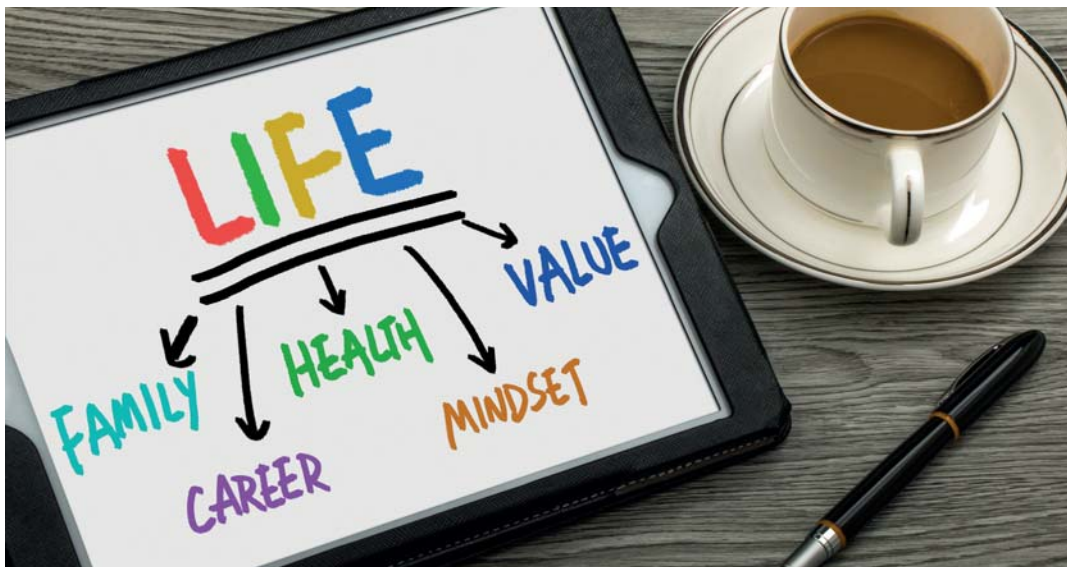
### Dori Hines, Partner

Ah, the elusive concept of work-life balance for attorneys. Is it possible?

As attorneys, we're in a service business. Global clients expect us to be available around the clock. And with ubiquitous cell phones, that's now, at least in theory, possible. I was once told by a client at 3:00 am (3:00am!) that he didn't understand why I hadn't responded to a routine request made at midnight; he expected "constant contact." Extreme? Yes. But it certainly makes a point. As attorneys, we're expected to be available. In response, we earn good livings.

Two things are required to achieve work-life balance. The first is to realise and embrace that you are responsible for the balancing. Ultimately, it's a matter of making choices for the type of life you want and the balance you want to achieve. Recognising that, it is up to us to clearly articulate our choices and to draw lines. Tell clients and co-workers when we are not available. Repeat as necessary. My experience has been that being direct, non-apologetic, and positive goes a long way to achieving the balance we need. Second, if we think of balance as a seesaw—sometimes at equipoise, sometimes tilting one way, and sometimes the other—then we understand that, at times, one side has to give. If, for example, I want to have the experience of first-chairing a trial or briefing and arguing an appeal, I may need to forego the trip to Napa for a few months, even though it's very important to me. By the same token, we need to realise when we're truly not essential to a work task and take those opportunities for our non-work lives. Most importantly, decide what "balance" means for you, and then strive to achieve that.

For some, alternative schedules are an important part of achieving work-life balance. At Finnegan, we offer a range of alternative schedules. Each arrangement is developed to accommodate that individual's particular circumstances. Such alternatives are essential for retaining and promoting our talent. Alternative work schedules can be temporary—for example, when we need to take care of small children or have a parent who is ill—or they can be permanent. How they work best depends on the person; there is no one-size-fits-all for these very personal choices of how to manage our lives. But again, what is crucial is to take ownership and control. Make a plan. Implement your plan. Be responsible and honour your commitments.



Michele P Moorman

## White & Case

### Michele P Moorman, Associate Director of People Development

The firm's flexible work arrangement (FWA) policy provides a valuable opportunity for lawyers to enhance their skills and achieve their professional goals while enabling them to meet their personal responsibilities. The formal policy provides our lawyers with a clear, consistent and equitable process for collaboratively proposing and implementing FWAs.

Building on the policy, we enlisted our professional development team to coach and provide operational support to our lawyers and partners throughout the FWA lifecycle. The coaching focuses on the importance of open and candid communication, being accountable and being flexible. Lawyers also openly share best practices with each other about their experiences working under an FWA. These support systems, coupled with the dedication and focus of the lawyers working flexibly, has allowed us to build broad-based partner support for the policy.

Our annual evaluation feedback shows that lawyers with FWAs are often viewed as more efficient, better delegators and mentors. All employers strive to attract and retain top talent. Adopting and properly supporting FWAs is one way in which a firm can distinguish itself and do all it can to support its lawyers in their ability to succeed in their work and personal endeavours.

