

In Their Words: Hacks For New Lawyer Parents From Veterans

By **Aebra Coe**

Law360 (November 1, 2023, 1:12 PM EDT) -- As the legal industry considers the results of a new report by the American Bar Association showing the extensive challenges parents, and particularly mothers, face in law firms, six seasoned lawyer parents share their advice to newbies for balancing family and work.

The challenges of being both a parent and a lawyer are numerous. The ABA report released Wednesday found that 70% of mothers and 41% of fathers working in law firms feel overwhelmed with all the things they have to do, and 69% of mothers and 52% of fathers experience stress about work.

There are extensive structural and organizational issues that need to be addressed in the industry in order to improve the lives of parent lawyers, according to the report.

However, until those changes begin to be implemented across the industry and society, Law360 Pulse compiled this list of advice from six parents at six law firms, in their own words, on navigating the challenges that come with being a parent and lawyer.

Galia Amram Morrison Foerster LLP

My tip for making life as a parent and lawyer smoother and easier is to figure out what really matters with both jobs and cut out the rest. There is so much pressure to do everything at home and at work, and now we are also told about all the self-care we should be doing. We need to cook every meal, volunteer at school, attend every field trip and PTA meeting, meditate daily, exercise, eat healthy, attend every evening work event, be a good mentor, socialize with clients and colleagues, etc. We can't do all that. So choose. Pick what actually matters to your success as a lawyer and the wellbeing of your kids. And let the rest go.

Jennifer Wu Groombridge Wu Baughman & Stone LLP

I had three kids in four years, and was elected partner in the year between the first and second child. The best advice I received was that parenting young children is a short and defined period in life, and to draw boundaries to enjoy that period. For example, when BigLaw opposing counsel asked for a 6 p.m. meet-and-confer, I responded to everyone on the distribution list that I was picking up my toddler from daycare at that time and could not make it. For someone who had been successful in part because I said "yes" to everything, learning to say "no" was a big deal. But the more I said "no," the more I realized that the version of me that said "yes" all the time was not someone my associates (or I) wanted to be.

Laranda Walker Susman Godfrey LLP

Figuring out ways to productively work outside the office has been critical for me as I try to balance being a mom and a lawyer. I've tried to create a functional home workspace so that when I need to work from home because a child is sick, or maybe there's a school activity placed right in the middle of the workday, I can do so effectively. I've also gotten accustomed to working from just about any place you can imagine, as it seems we are constantly on the go. Because I rarely have the luxury of large chunks of uninterrupted time, I've had to learn to take advantage of whatever windows I can find to try and get things done. This can be while we're sitting in the waiting room at a doctor's office, or during warm-ups for a baseball game. I try to keep either my laptop or iPad accessible so that even if it's just catching up on emails or reviewing a brief, I try to make use of the time.

Dylan Alper Cozen O'Connor

As a father of a toddler, and expecting a newborn in just a few weeks, I constantly find myself trying to crack the code of how to be the best lawyer and dad — all day, every day. I've come to learn, though, that striving for perfection is a futile exercise. The best tip I received from colleagues and nonlawyer friends alike when I first became a parent was to ask for help. It seems basic and obvious, but we as lawyers tend to think we can do it all. I'm not afraid these days, and in fact I'm inclined, to ask for help when I need it. I set boundaries and am honest with colleagues, opposing counsel, and clients when I have a childcare issue or simply need some personal time to be a parent. The best way to strike a balance, in my opinion, is to recognize your limitations, utilize others in your village, give yourself a break, and ask for help. And, contrary to popular belief, it's not a weakness; it's a strength.

Megan Monson Lowenstein Sandler LLP

As a partner at a law firm and a mom to a nearly two-year-old, I often juggle both of these full-time jobs and balance a never-ending to-do list. Both are labors of love; however, it can be overwhelming at times. One of the things that helps me navigate is utilizing my calendar for professional and personal items. This forces me to stay organized while reducing my stress level and limiting the likelihood something will slip through the cracks. It also makes wearing both hats more enjoyable and manageable. Having time that is dedicated either solely to work or to spending time with my daughter allows me to be more present during each activity. For example, I have "family dinner" as a standing invite in my calendar and use my best efforts to avoid scheduling things during that time, unless it is truly unavoidable. While things like that may come up, having a road map to follow helps me feel more in control and able to tackle it all.

Tracy Peterson Braverman Greenspun

The thing that helped me the most as a new parent — and continues to help me as the parent of a middle schooler — is flexibility in scheduling. My firm worked with me early on, before working from home was standard fare, allowing me to be home on Fridays each week. This allowed me to focus on being a lawyer, at the office, Monday through Thursday, and to get "life" stuff [like] grocery shopping, medical appointments, etc. done on Fridays when my child was with a caregiver or in school, and to have the weekends to recharge and enjoy family time. [I]f it is possible for lawyer-parents to set aside a day (or part of a day) each week when their child is in day care, or with a caregiver or in school, and they can just be themselves, and not a lawyer, mom, dad, spouse, etc., it can do wonders for focus and productivity at work and at home.

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