



NYSBA

# Women's Community

A publication of the New York State Bar Association

## The Quest for Work/Life Balance

By Kathryn Grant Madigan, Esq.



As lawyers, we often get so caught up in our day-to-day challenges that we forget the importance of balance in our personal and professional lives. In a recent NYSBA survey, women attorneys were asked what career-related issues mattered most to them. Not surprisingly, work-life balance was at the top of the list.

Fifty years ago, an ABA lawyer's handbook reported that "there are only approximately 1300 fee-earning hours per year" for an attorney with a "normal" schedule. Today, 2300 hours, especially at large law firms, is the new "normal." Regardless of their number of years in practice, size of firm, practice setting, etc., lawyers consistently report difficulty in achieving a balanced life in the law. They experience long, inflexible hours;

deadlines; intense competition; clients demanding 24/7 access; family responsibilities, including child and elder care; and interrupted or minimal vacation time. It is a breeding ground for burnout and stress disorders.

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*"The way we spend our days is the way we spend our lives . . . " — Annie Dillard*

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Overwhelming stress often results in substance and alcohol abuse, addictive behaviors and depression, which are far more common among lawyers, who tend to be highly competitive, driven,

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## Featured Event

### Tenth Annual Edith I. Spivack Symposium and NYSBA Women's Community New York City Kick-Off Celebration

January 28, 2014 – New York Hilton Midtown

*Each year, the Committee on Women in the Law hosts the Edith I. Spivack Symposium during the Association's Annual Meeting in New York City. This year's symposium will take place on Tuesday, January 28 at the New York Hilton Midtown, and will feature a full-day CLE program on gender equity in compensation, promotion and business development. The program will be followed by a reception to celebrate the New York City kick-off of the NYSBA Women's Community. For more information, please visit [www.nysba.org/womeninthelaw](http://www.nysba.org/womeninthelaw)*

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# Online Resources

## Online Women's Community Has Launched!

by Barbara Beauchamp

In October, NYSBA launched the new private online professional community for women. Our new private online professional communities allow women to create profiles, participate in online conversations, share resources, collaborate on projects and connect one-on-one with other members.

All members of the community are welcome to participate in all discussions – on topics ranging from how to break into certain fields to the unique challenges facing women as they climb the career ladder and much more – as well as contribute to the resource library and use the searchable directory to connect with other members.

To join the conversation, log in to the NYSBA website and visit <http://communities.nysba.org>. Click Groups on the navigation and choose Women's Community from the menu. You can begin posting, connecting and discussing topics of interest with other logged in members right away. If you have trouble logging in, please contact us at [webmaster@nysba.org](mailto:webmaster@nysba.org) or 800-582-2452. We look forward to continuing the conversation through the online women's community! ∞

*Barbara Beauchamp is NYSBA's Manager of Internet Services.*

## A Profile in Leadership

### Sharon Stern Gerstman, Esq.

by Alma Lafferty, Esq.

*Sharon Stern Gerstman is treasurer of the New York State Bar Association. She is of counsel to Magavern Magavern Grimm in Buffalo, New York. A 32-year NYSBA member, Sharon previously served on the Executive Committee as the Eighth Judicial District Vice-President. She is a member of the House of Delegates, Finance Committee, Dispute Resolution Section, and Torts, Insurance and Compensation Law Section's Executive Committee.*

**Q: What advice would you give a newly admitted attorney starting a career today?**

**A:** New lawyers should focus on being well-rounded — don't specialize too early on in your career. Don't be discouraged by the amount of "grunt work" you may have to do. New lawyers should focus on their interests and passions, and get involved in their bar associations. It is also important for the young lawyer to focus on "life balance." Life balance in the law not only includes making time for family, children, hobbies and general health, but also working with your legal peers outside of the office through active involvement with the organized bar.

**Q: What has changed in the practice of law since you became an attorney?**

**A:** The change in technology has had a dramatic effect on the practice of law. Today there is an expectation of an instant response, but practitioners when I was a young practicing attorney were used to saying, "I am pretty sure I know the answer to the question but give me a little more time to think about things."

**Q: What was your experience as a woman in law school in the 1970s?**

**A:** I was in school at a time when the graduating law school class had only 10% females. There was a lot of gender bias and discrimination against women in general. In law school, I was often told that as a "female law student I was taking the place of a man who had to support his family."



**Q: How did you become involved in NYSBA?**

**A:** Maryann Saccomando Freedman was one of the first female presidents of the New York State Bar Association and the Erie County Bar Association. She was instrumental in getting me involved in a number of bar committees and assisting with program events, and there were ample opportunities to meet a variety of people and stay involved.

**Q: What have been the most valuable parts of bar involvement?**

**A:** I had an active role in changing some of the federal tax laws, I had an opportunity to submit an amicus curiae brief and argue to the 5th circuit, and I also had a role in changing and developing a number of laws under the CPLR. The contacts I made through various bar associations also helped to ease my transition to private practice. A lifetime of bar association work has provided me with a number of professional opportunities. ∞

*Alma Lafferty serves as a Senior Attorney to the New York State Department of Transportation. She is an active member and past diversity co-chair of the Young Lawyers Section.*



*The NYSBA Women's Community Newsletter is a joint effort of the Committee on Women in the Law, the Committee on Membership and members of the NYSBA Staff. Special thanks to volunteer editorial board members Sarah Gold, Claire Gutekunst, Lillian Moy and Ferre Ozturk.*

# Women's Wellness

## Perfect to the Point of Impaired

by Patricia Spataro

I was invited to write an article for the last edition of this newsletter. It was suggested that I keep the article to 200 words. The suggestion became a self-imposed obsession. With much finessing I wrote exactly 200 words. Am I a perfectionist or just conscientious?

As I researched my question I took a short online assessment. I answered "yes" to being satisfied with good performance, motivated by a desire for success and not the fear of it, to being organized, and to focusing on my good qualities rather than my flaws. It appears I am conscientious.

A perfectionist would answer "no" to the questions because they narrowly define success and broadly define failure, stay committed to unrealistic expectations, equate self-worth with perfor-

mance and, surprisingly, are disorganized. The goal of perfection is impossible and actually leads to problems and even impairment.

The profession seems to demand perfection of lawyers, but the problems that come with it are serious and can include anxiety, depression, and substance abuse. These can impair an attorney's ability to practice and pose serious risks to life and license. If you are realizing the down side of trying to be perfect, seek help for ways to change.

And go ahead count them – there are 223 words in this article. ∞

*Patricia Spataro is Director of NYSBA's Lawyer Assistance Program. You can learn more about LAP and find helpful resources by visiting [www.nylap.org](http://www.nylap.org).*

# Women on the Move 2013

On October 17, the Committee on Women in the Law hosted Women on the Move 2013: "Racing Ahead of the Curve: Tech-Savvy Practice Pointers for Innovative Women Attorneys" at the Bar Center in Albany. The program featured excellent panels on communication strategies for a fast-paced world and technology tips, and ended with a "speed networking practicum" to help participants hone their communication skills. The program was followed by the NYSBA Women's Community Kick-Off Reception, featuring keynote remarks by Lillian Moy. We thank our excellent speakers and everyone who attended!



Keynote Speaker  
Lillian Moy

*Photo by V. Pilar Arthur-Snead,  
Photographic Expressions*



# The New York Bar Foundation Gives Back

by Cristine Cioffi, Esq.

The New York Bar Foundation and The NYSBA Women's Community share the common value of advancing women in the legal profession. The Foundation has had the privilege of working with strong women leaders, including Maryann Saccamando Freedman and Catherine Richardson, both of whom have served as Presidents of both the Association and the Foundation.

The Foundation was created as a separate, tax-exempt organization in 1950, and serves as the charitable branch of the Association. By collecting charitable contributions, the Foundation is able to make grants each year to law-related organizations, for non-profit purposes.

The Foundation has provided many ways for women attorneys to give back to society and their profession. One such example is The Miriam Maccoby Netter Fellowship, created and funded by the Intellectual Property Law Section, and named in honor of "Mimi" Netter. In this way, the Section is able to honor Ms. Netter, a former Intellectual Property Section leader, for her singular and extraordinary contributions that led to the Section's growth and success.

Applications are now being accepted for this fellowship, which is granted annually to a law student engaged in intellectual property work in a law firm. The deadline for law firms to apply for this funding is December 31, 2013. Visit The Foundation website at [www.tnbf.org](http://www.tnbf.org) for more information.

Miriam "Mimi" Maccoby Netter's personal and professional philosophy was focused on her dedication to education for all, keeping current with emerging areas of the law, and mentoring new attorneys. During her lifetime she had placed an emphasis on women attorneys because of their difficulty in gaining access to many areas of legal practice.

Though Ms. Netter passed away in September 2010 after a lengthy illness, the fellowship in her name continues to assist those in the legal profession. ∞

*Cristine Cioffi is a Principal Partner at Cioffi • Slezak • Wildgrube P.C., and President of The New York Bar Foundation.*

## What Do You Think About...?

by Richard Martin and Connie Schin

In October, we asked some of you three questions about alternative work arrangements. More than 1,000 women attorneys shared their feedback.

We learned that, in the past five years, a plurality of respondents (41%) have not participated in any alternative work arrangements. Some have used telecommuting (31%) or flextime (18%). In addition:

- 34% of respondents currently have the option of telecommuting, 28% can use parental leave, and 30% of respondents reported that no alternative work arrangements are currently available to them.

- If given the option, 29% of respondents would find telecommuting to be the most beneficial arrangement, while 19% would opt for flextime and 18% would choose a compressed work week.

What do you think? If you are a NYSBA member who wants to discuss this in our private online professional community, go to [www.nysba.org/WomensCommunity](http://www.nysba.org/WomensCommunity) and click on the relevant link. If you need help logging in, just e-mail us at [webmaster@nysba.org](mailto:webmaster@nysba.org) or call us at 1-800-582-2452.

*Richard Martin is NYSBA's Associate Executive Director, and Connie Schin is NYSBA's Marketing Manager. ∞*

# A Benefit for Members

## NYSBA's Career Center

Job hunting itself can be a full-time job. The Internet definitely assists, but you still need to know where and how to begin finding those firms that are actually hiring. NYSBA's Career Center can help you in your search. Simply go to [www.nysba.org/jobs](http://www.nysba.org/jobs) to access NYSBA's full-feature job service board. It offers members-only, free, timely resources and benefits, including confidential resume posting and exclusive access to posted ads for 14 days – exactly those hiring firms you were looking for. ∞



## Join/Renew

### Your NYSBA Membership!

To fully participate in the NYSBA Women's Community, including our Private Online Professional Community, join or renew today! Call us at 800-582-2452 or e-mail us at [membership@nysba.org](mailto:membership@nysba.org).

## Quest for Work/Life Balance continued

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A-Type personalities. The statistics are grim. Attorneys suffer from alcoholism and depression at twice the rate of the general population. A recent ABA study found that up to 70% of attorney disciplinary cases in New York and California involved alcoholism or other substance abuse.

Women lawyers also tend to have higher expectations about their other roles, as spouses, parents and community volunteers. This increasing lack of balance has created what I call Type E stress, which comes from the tendency to be "everything to everyone" and results in increased risk of heart disease (the #1 cause of death in adult women), stress disorders and premature death.

The State Bar has been at the forefront in examining work/life challenges on behalf of our members. For example, in 2005 then President Ken Standard appointed former President Catherine Richardson to chair a Special Committee on Balanced Lives in the Law to study how attorneys meet the professional, societal and personal demands confronting them, and how lawyers, law of-

fices, bar associations and law schools can help to create healthy, flexible work environments that nurture and develop human capital. At forums throughout the state, we heard from diverse groups of lawyers about their distress with the inordinate demands of law practice, and how it intrudes in their private lives. The 2008 Committee Report outlined concrete recommendations and tools to address the lack of balance reported by so many of us, as well as model law firm flex time, part time and vacation policies. You can view the report by visiting [www.nysba.org/substantivereports](http://www.nysba.org/substantivereports).

While there is no panacea for achieving work/life balance, we have the power to control how we respond to the demands and stress in our lives. In future columns, we will be exploring with you what we have learned about how to create a more meaningful, satisfying and healthy life in the law. We welcome and invite your active participation. ∞

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WOMEN'S COMMUNITY

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*Connecting women attorneys  
with NYSBA and with each other  
for professional success.*

