

## Q&A on Work-Life Balance and “Leaning In”

**Washington Women Lawyers: What is your current position and how does your background as a lawyer influence what you do?**

**Amy Kosterlitz:** I am a professional development coach, working with lawyers and other professionals, to clarify and realize their goals. My coaching provides support for clients to better align their professional and personal lives with their priorities. Coaching topics often include: developing a new career vision or advancement plan, enhancing leadership presence and confidence, improving management and communication skills, finding work-life balance, and navigating transitions.

My background, which includes three decades of law practice, supervision of other lawyers and participation in law firm management, allows me to understand the challenges that attorneys face. I know the stresses inherent in the legal profession and the typical stages of an attorney’s career development. My first-hand experience practicing law helps me assist lawyer-clients to create successful strategies to overcome obstacles and to find fulfillment, advancement, autonomy and balance.

**WWL: Do you agree with Ms. Bellows’ opinion expressed in her article that work-life balance in the legal field is a “fraud”?**

**AK:** No. I think it is possible to achieve work-life balance and practice law -- but that doesn’t mean it’s easy. I define work-life balance as the ability to devote sufficient time to your legal career so that you can

feel proud of your work and earn enough, yet still have time to enjoy family, friends and other activities and feel personally fulfilled. Of course, what constitutes work-life balance will differ among individual attorneys. Work-life balance is not a status that one can achieve and then relax—it’s an ongoing process of experimentation and course-correction. It involves juggling to keep many balls in the air, and not giving up when some of the balls come crashing down.

My optimism that one can achieve a reasonable work-life balance is based on my experience practicing law, while raising two children with an attorney spouse. It was often challenging to find and maintain the balance between work, family and other pursuits, but it was ultimately satisfying to have the rich life afforded by being involved in all of these realms.

**WWL: What does it take to find your own work-life balance?**

**AK:** I think there are three essential elements to achieving work-life bal-



**Amy Kosterlitz, JD, PCC**  
[www.amykosterlitz.com](http://www.amykosterlitz.com)

ance while practicing law. The first is having the right mindset—a combination of both a “can do” and a flexible attitude. Work-life balance involves a strong belief that you can set boundaries--on work and commitments outside of work, and get others to respect those boundaries. Conversely, it requires a willingness to compromise, based on the recognition that one can’t always “have it all”—and certainly not all at once. These compromises can include temporarily delaying one’s career ascent or giving up interesting assignments when they require excess hours. Achieving work-life balance also sometimes means sacrificing some personal commitments when these conflict with work responsibilities. Individual attorneys must determine which compromises are acceptable and be courageous in setting their boundaries.

The second critical element is building good support systems—both at work and outside of work—to help with the “balancing act.” I was fortunate to have law partners who supported me in working a reduced schedule, and a spouse who was willing to pitch in at home. It still wasn’t easy when the kids would get sick or a client commitment would interfere with the school play, but with some creativity and flexibility, I often felt I had the best of both worlds.

A third element of work-life balance is realizing that it’s not just about making time for work and outside activities, but one of energy management. The more you can craft your job to allow you to do the things you like and that give you energy, the less depleting work becomes. Similarly, if

*(Continued on page 8)*



*Q&A with Kosterlitz, continued from page 5*

you can find outside activities that replenish your energy—e.g., exercise or fun activities with family and friends—you can tolerate those periods that demand longer work hours and the frustrations of juggling.

**WWL:** *How can legal employers help women attorneys find work-life balance?*

**AK:** Legal employers have come a long way since I began law practice in 1980 in accommodating women attorneys who need flexibility--by adopting flexible work options and non-equity partner "tracks" with reduced hours expectations. However, if not handled carefully, these alternative tracks can become "second tier" tracks, lacking in professional growth opportunities and limiting career development and fulfillment for promising attorneys. These "second tier" tracks can also lead to attrition because without the incentive of interesting work or advancement, women attorneys who have significant family responsibilities often choose to leave. Many law firms have seen this kind of attrition.

In order to promote a healthy work-life balance and keep their talent, legal employers should not

automatically relegate women attorneys working reduced or flexible schedules to a "second tier" track. Both legal employers and attorneys would benefit from the recognition that lawyers working reduced or flexible schedules can provide top-tier legal services, as well as develop business and exert leadership, as was my experience. I see too many firms losing women attorneys who choose to work part-time because the firms offer them little promise of advancement, interesting work or self-determination.

**WWL:** *How does Sheryl Sandberg's advice that women "lean in" to advance at work apply in the context of the legal profession?*

**AK:** Sandberg's advice about the need for women to "lean in" at work applies well to the legal profession, where, as in the corporate world "Career progression often depends upon taking risks and advocating for oneself—traits that girls are discouraged from exhibiting." *Lean In*, p. 15. Consistent with Sandberg's statistics in other fields, there is a "leadership gap" in the legal field--women constitute 45 percent of law firm associates but just 15 percent have reached equity partnership (and less in the 200 largest firms). Women are still only 22 percent of the federal judiciary and 26 percent of the state judges. Female lawyers too often earn 75 percent or less of what male counterparts earn for doing the same job. *Advancement of Women Lawyers: Barriers Must Be Removed so Female Attorneys Can Equally Participate*; William T Robinson, III, ABA Journal, January 2012.

*(Continued on page 9)*

*On April 10, 2013, the State Board of Washington Women Lawyers formally adopted an official diversity policy that applies to the entire organization at both the chapter and state levels. We are pleased to have adopted a policy that has always been the longstanding mission and practice of the organization: to foster diversity in the legal profession.*

### WWL Diversity Policy

Washington Women Lawyers is committed to fostering, cultivating and preserving a culture of diversity and inclusion. In furtherance of WWL's core mission, our efforts to promote inclusion and diversity of all kinds in the legal profession include, but are not limited to, partnerships with other Minority Bar Associations and access to justice organizations through joint networking events, sponsorship opportunities, and legislative and policy support. WWL provides representation and strongly supports diversity initiatives and committees organized through the Washington State Bar Association and other affiliated groups. Our broad reach across Washington State also includes an emphasis on geographic diversity through support of our local chapter level efforts.

We embrace and encourage our members' differences in age, color, disability, ethnicity, family or marital status, sex, gender, gender identity or expression, language, national origin, physical and mental ability, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, veteran status, and other characteristics that make our members unique. WWL's commitment to fostering and promoting diversity applies to all levels of our organization and membership, including recruitment and leadership opportunities. All WWL members have a responsibility to treat others with dignity and respect at all times. All members are expected to exhibit conduct that reflects positively on the organization and its members and foster inclusion.



*Q&A with Kosterlitz, continued from page 8*

Women attorneys who want to advance need to “lean in” by developing confidence and willingness to accept challenges – without losing sight of their work-life balance. As Sandberg pointed out, while women are as competent as men (and sometimes more), they are less likely than men to accept “stretch” assignments or take risks, because they underrate their abilities and don’t want to risk failure. I often see this with my clients and we work on enhancing confidence while reducing critical self-judgment and fear of failure. One key component in reducing fear of failure is cultivating resilience—the ability to bounce back from setbacks. If you believe you can survive a failure, you are more willing to try.

In law as in the corporate world, women who want career advancement also need to become comfortable taking credit for their achievements. Women often work hard and do stellar legal work but don’t tout their achievements, thinking their efforts will be recognized and promotion will follow. Many women are also not comfortable “blowing their own horn.” However, as in the corporate realm, promotions in law often involve a significant element of self-promotion. Women need to find authentic and comfortable ways of seeking credit for their accomplishments and expressing their desire for advancement. Unfortunately, in doing so, women have to be mindful of the “double bind” Sandberg identifies and many of us have experienced—women need to assert themselves to succeed but without seeming to be overly aggressive in order not to confound persisting societal expectations of appropriate feminine behavior. A tall order! Hopefully, over time, as women occupy more leadership positions these attitudes will change and women can escape this “double bind.”

*WWL: What can legal employers do to help women attorneys “lean in”?*

**AK:** Legal employers need to “lean in” too and meet their women attorneys half way. This means giving women opportunities for professional growth and leadership. For example, an employer may fault a woman attorney for not showing leadership, at the same time that they fail to give her leadership opportunities to develop her skills.

Leaning in also means giving women support in developing the confidence, assertiveness and resilience that are required for advancement. Professional development support for women attorneys can be provided by mentors and with training and coaching. Often, for women attorneys to advance, mentoring is not enough, and as with men, women attorneys need a “sponsor”—a senior attorney who acts as a “champion” and is willing to use his or her influence to help a woman attorney get challenging assignments and recognition. Legal employers who are serious about advancing women attorneys should help them find both mentors and sponsors.

Finally, legal employers need to be alert to and counteract “implicit bias”—the unstated and often unconscious bias about women’s abilities and proper roles, which persist even as our explicit attitudes evolve, and which function as the invisible “glass ceiling.” Employers need to recognize that many women express their drive for leadership differently than men, for example by being a good team player rather than a standout individual. Employers need to value the contributions typical of women—such as collaboration and empathy— as highly as those which are typical of men. This will not only benefit women attorneys by “leveling the playing field” but will benefit the legal profession by allowing it to capitalize on the valuable leadership contributions of both female and male attorneys. ♦♦♦

Asian Bar Association of Washington (ABAW) & Asian Bar Association of Washington Student Scholarship Foundation (ABAWSSF)'s  
**24<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL GALA**

FRIDAY  
OCT 18<sup>TH</sup>  
2013

ASIAN BAR ASSOCIATION OF WASHINGTON

Hyatt at Olive 8  
1635 8th Avenue  
Seattle, Washington  
5:30 to 6:30pm Reception  
Dinner & Program begins at 6:30pm

Keynote Speaker  
Justice Goodwin Liu  
Associate Justice of the California  
Supreme Court



PATTERSON BUCHANAN  
FOBES & LEITCH, INC., P.S.

RSVP and purchase tickets at [www.bit.ly/ABAW2013](http://www.bit.ly/ABAW2013)

\$75 for ABAW members and \$100 for all other guests.  
Deadline to purchase tickets is **September 27, 2013.**

Please contact ABAW Gala Committee Chair, Fo-Ching Lu  
at [foching.lu@gmail.com](mailto:foching.lu@gmail.com) for details

For sponsorship opportunities, please contact Gala Sponsorship  
Coordinator, Carmen Wong at [CWong@perkinscoie.com](mailto:CWong@perkinscoie.com)

