

## 2009 Balance Symposium

# Speakers share tips on finding balance in different legal careers, describe Balanomics Initiative promoting flexibility

By Karie J. Boyd and Jessica Fink

Lawyers Club hosted its third annual Symposium on Work/Life Balance March 19, with panelists addressing approaches to balance in a variety of legal careers and describing a new initiative designed to encourage the legal community to adopt and promote more flexible business models.

Lawyers Club's Balance Campaign, which was formed in 2005, sponsored the symposium, and Balance Campaign Committee co-chairs Licia Vaughn and Karen Hernandez coordinated this year's event.

California Western School of Law professor Jacquelyn Hersh Slotkin moderated a morning panel discussion with speakers from various different legal careers, while the founders of the Balanomics Initiative gave a lunchtime presentation about the campaign to invite law firms, law departments, and professional associations to sign a pledge to encourage a workplace culture that values work quality, responsiveness and accessibility over face time.

### Finding Balance Across the Profession

Lawyers – whether working in law firms or as solo practitioners, in academia or in-house, in the courts or in government agencies – share a common desire to balance work with a satisfying personal life.

“We all have the same 24 hours in a day,” said panelist Amanda Mineer, co-founder of the National Association of Freelance Legal Professionals. “Balance is primarily about making a choice and managing your time.”

University of San Diego School of Law associate professor Lisa P. Ramsey said, for her, balance is about “time and flexibility,” finding a place within the profession that allows her to account for the many demands of her professional, family and personal life.

Kimberly Greer, Of Counsel at Morrison & Foerster LLP, said balance may not occur on a daily basis but rather might be more of a year-long process. She added that she schedules a week-long vacation every year.

“Different people need different types of balance,” Greer said. “Part of balance in a big firm is having a Blackberry, and even on vacation, I do check it.”

Others on the morning panel described the need to think about balance from a personal perspective.

“Find out what works, and know that that is okay for you,” said Karen Tanler Fleming, Deputy Commissioner for the Board of Parole Hearings.

Mineer echoed this focus on finding one's own sense of balance, describing the key to balance as “finding something that fulfills you.”

### Balanomics: Seeking a Better Business Model

The afternoon panel featured the founders of the recently launched Balanomics Initiative – PETCO Law Department general counsel and vice president Darragh Davis; McKenna Long & Aldridge partner Rupa Singh, who also serves as the initiative's liaison to the North American South Asian Bar Association; Elizabeth Daniels, chief legal counsel for SIMNSA and the immediate past president of the Associa-



Rupa Singh and Elizabeth Daniels

Photo by Jane Engelman

tion of Corporate Counsel-San Diego; and Deborah Epstein Henry, founder and president of New York-based Flex-Time Lawyers LLC.

The speakers explained that the initiative is premised on demonstrating the economic value and other benefits of well implemented work/life balance policies as an alternative to attrition and layoffs – and the panelists specifically addressed the feasibility of asking law firms to focus on balance in these tough economic times.

Henry said firms may be surprised to learn that they can accrue greater cost savings by reducing associates' hours 50 hours per year than they would by conducting layoffs within their associate ranks.

Davis added that legal employers that offer reduced-hour and other flexible schedules avoid losing their investment in attorney recruitment and training, minimize replacement costs when the economy recovers, boost morale, and build institutional knowledge.

“Just like there is a business case for improving diversity in the profession, there is a clear cut business case for improving work/life balance in the law,” Singh said.

Davis said law firms' adoption of flexible schedules and improved retention also saves money for corporate clients, who pay more in getting-up-to-speed costs when outside counsel teams experience turnover.

Daniels said better business models benefit employers as well as employees.

“It's time for us to think creatively about how to structure employment and retention arrangements, to ensure a place for everyone at the table,” Daniels said. “I believe this can be done in such a way that it will maximize attorney productivity, profitability and their professional satisfaction.”

San Diego County Bar Association president and Littler Mendelson partner Jerrilyn Malana, who attended the Balance Symposium, appreciated the focus on the positive benefits of balance efforts for employers.

“The Balanomics Initiative demonstrates that work-life balance programs are a ‘win-win’ proposition for both employees and employers,” Malana said.

To learn more about Balanomics, visit [www.balanomics.net](http://www.balanomics.net).

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