

Group offers 'Life Balance' help to female lawyers

By Jerry Crimmins
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Do women lawyers need a wife as well as a mentor?

A new, Chicago-based group, Legal Balance, that says it helps female attorneys with work-life balance, holds its "formal launch event and grand opening" Thursday night at the offices of Schiff, Hardin LLP, 233 S. Wacker Drive.

The event is already full, "which is news in itself," said the founder of the group, Erica Zalokar.

According to one member, Tonya W. Moore, in-house counsel at Orbitz Worldwide in Chicago, Legal Balance is "rent-a-wife."

In addition to offering tips, articles and speakers on how to get ahead, Legal Balance, according to Moore, offers resources on "how do you run your home."

"Do you need someone to serve as a runner ... to pick up your dry-cleaning, go to the store," or someone for house cleaning or a dog walker? Or help with "the beauty aspect?" Moore said Legal Balance offers vendors for that and also has information on "nanny sharing issues."

"If you and I have a child within the same age range and live close to one another, it helps to alleviate the high cost," Moore said.

Another woman lawyer, Susan J. G. Zumph, vice president, legal, for Equity Residential, gave a different reason for joining.

"When I left working in a law firm to become an in-house counsel, I lost my peer group," Zumph said. "I no longer had a group of similarly situated, female co-workers.

"The Legal Balance fills that void by giving me a group who know exactly where I'm coming from to use as a sounding board and sometimes just to listen."

The group's website, www.thelegalbalance.com, offers the opportunity to ask questions and get answers from the group on matters such as family, work, health and beauty.

To join costs \$50 a year, according to Jean Bogdaniec, the general manager. "We're an online community," she said. "I believe we are teetering right around 500 members."

Zalokar said she is a former corporate litigator who left the practice of law in 2006. She said the thriving attorneys she knew were mostly men who "showed up at 7 a.m., worked until 7, if not later, [also] on the weekends" and traveled nonstop.

"Their lives were completely taken care of for them by their other half, and they were able to get out there and meet with clients, bring in business and truly succeed.

"The women were just as smart, worked just as hard, but could not seem to get ahead."

Zalokar said she sees "women floundering all around me" in their efforts to do both their jobs and home duties.

She decided to "create a community, something, to help them manage it all."

Zalokar and Bogdaniec offered the agenda of their event tonight at Schiff, Hardin as an example of the legal networking plus home management resources that Legal Balance offers.

Speakers will be Laurel G. Bellows, principal of Bellows Law Group P.C., who is a member of the board of directors of the American Bar Association and past chairwoman of the ABA House of Delegates; Jane DiRenzo Pigott, managing director of R3 Group LLC; and Jeanine M. Jiganti, vice president and in-house counsel for Takeda Pharmaceuticals North America in Deerfield.

Moore, who is also president of the Black Women Lawyers Association, is the scheduled moderator.

Vendors will be available at tables, Bogdaniec said, to offer concierge services, nannies and child care, a meal delivery service for work or home, "a private chef who comes to you and does catering," an interior designer and money management.

Dr. Jonith Breadon, an "aesthetic dermatologist," and a representative of Lake Shore Athletic Clubs are also scheduled to be present.

The event will feature a reading from the book, "A Merger of Equals," by Debra H. Snider, "a love story set against the backdrop of the business world," according to Amazon.com.

And it will be "the first networking event to unite and empower women attorneys" that has a cabaret singer, Zalokar said. The singer is Pam Peterson.

Moore said she found out about Legal Balance through an e-mail that "I thought was another piece of junk mail. I opened it up one day [and] I just fell in love with it."

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