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The Legal Balance

A look at Chicago's first online community exclusively for women attorneys

Do you have what it takes to be a rainmaker? [The Legal Balance](#), Chicago's exclusive community of women attorneys, hopes to answer this question for its members and prepare them for success.

Former litigation attorney [Erica Zalokar](#) created The Legal Balance in 2009 after realizing professional women all struggle with the same issue: they experience difficulty managing a work-life balance. Ms. Zalokar conducted market research with her team and found women in law wanted a forum to come together and communicate. Thus, The Legal Balance was born.

Primarily, The Legal Balance is a web-based community (www.thelegalbalance.com) that encourages talented women to excel in their careers through mentoring and networking. The organization connects women attorneys to a powerful network of leaders, a general counsel and successful women in other industries. The Legal Balance also provides its members with the resources necessary to succeed and simplify their lives.

"We serve as a one-stop shop for anything a woman attorney needs to help her manage her work and her life, top to bottom," explains Ms. Zalokar. Services available to members include meal delivery, errand running, childcare providers, women's work coaching, personal shopping and more, offered at special discounts. Although the majority of The Legal Balance community caters to women's needs, the organization also welcomes men. "We're open to men who are struggling with similar issues," says Ms. Zalokar. "We hope they join and are included as well."

The Legal Balance also fosters a supportive community for the inquiring attorney mind. The organization offers expert opinions in business development, cosmetic dermatology, employee benefits, image consulting, legal staffing, plastic surgery, real estate and wealth management; any question Legal Balance members have can be answered by the community. "Regardless of the professional sphere in which we practice, women lawyers face work challenges unique to our profession," mentions Tracy Campbell, a member of The Legal Balance member and partner at SchiffHardin. "The Legal Balance provides a forum where we can give and receive honest and practical advice about how we can be more successful in our professional and personal lives." Members are encouraged to ask questions they would be unable to voice at their firms, free from guilt or embarrassment.

In addition, The Legal Balance provides career advice with the insight of their Dear Jane contributor, Jane Pigott. Ms. Pigott, the managing director of R3 Group LLC, answers questions from the legal community of women, ranging from career success to office relationships.

"I receive very specific questions from attorneys about how to succeed in a legal organization, typically in a law firm," Ms. Pigott says. "These individuals don't have mentors to turn to and ask questions relating to how one handles a situation. Our members really want to succeed," she adds.

A significant component to the organization is its emphasis on connecting women to female 'rainmakers.' Rainmakers are individuals who bring in new business and whose influence can initiate progress within their law firm.



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“Rainmaking is where there are the fewest women leaders,” says Ms. Zalokar. “We want to help women at this highest level, and then help them navigate down to the bottom, to the day-to-day.” Because there are few female rainmakers, The Legal Balance encourages these women to share their stories and talent, spread knowledge and maintain a balance by creating an open community. “Being able to network with others about resources in the community and to learn about how others juggle the various aspects of their career is a great tool,” says The Legal Balance member Liisa Thomas, an attorney at Winston & Strawn LLP. “The Legal Balance is an invaluable asset to our profession.”

The Legal Balance sends out weekly email blasts containing Dear Jane questions, group posts, niche articles and a showcase on a woman leader every week. “We aggregate the information and put it right in their laps,” says Ms. Zalokar.

Another asset to The Legal Balance is their event calendar, designed as an alternative to standard American Bar Association events, which introduces them to other professional female leaders in order to expand their network. “The women I’ve met networking have been instrumental in helping me develop my book of business,” says Lindsey Markus, an attorney with Chuhak & Tecson, P.C. and The Legal Balance member. Last October, The Legal Balance hosted its first networking event, which sold out immediately. Due to its success, Ms. Zalokar plans to host two more events in 2011; details will be posted on the community website in the coming months.

The combination of aggregated events, professional networking, open forums, expert advice and services truly benefits the work-life balance for Legal Balance attorneys. “Once we give our community access to resources, they can be more efficient and effective,” Ms. Zalokar adds. “Once they’re more efficient and effective, they meet business leaders, learn how to network, connect and manage life, which will aid in the promotion, retention and advancement of women attorneys in the legal profession and beyond.”

By Debra Lipson

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