

# Plate #1: Work with an Alternative “Spin”

By Amanda G. Schreiber

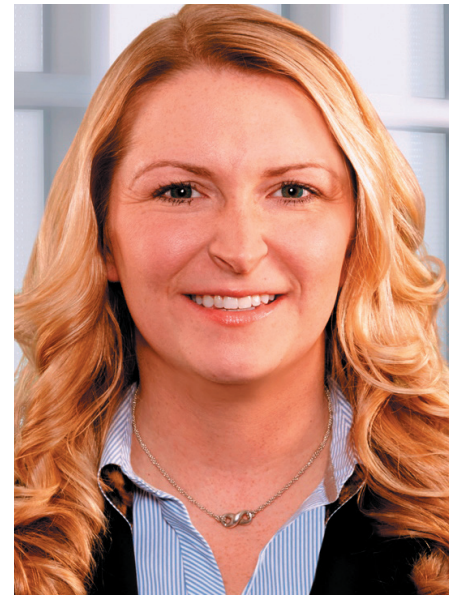
**F**or the first time, the majority of the officers of the Young Lawyers Section are in-house counsel. To me, this distinction represents the epitome of the paradigm shift occurring in the legal profession.

In my last article I discussed that I had recently attended a circus-themed show in Hartford where one performer in particular caught my attention: the plate spinner. Metaphorically, the world of being a young lawyer often feels like a gigantic plate spinning act. For that reason, I have decided to dedicate my column this year to exploring those various plates for the purpose of supporting our newest members in their struggles, while bringing to light the perspective of this generation for our older colleagues.

Perhaps the heaviest plate for a young lawyer is “work.” After all, logic-seeking, integrity-filled, dedicated, type-A individuals (as most lawyers tend to be) are invested in their careers, which serve as a large presence of validation in their lives. Let’s face it—lawyers like to work. We think it’s a privilege to take on responsibility and we take pride in doing our best. I see nothing wrong with that.

But the definition of legal work has expanded in recent years. Traditionally, being a lawyer has meant working in a law firm setting, including long billable hours and reading briefs late into the night. But the reality is that there are a lot of ways to be a successful lawyer outside of that setting. Gone is the day of the prototypical lawyer setting being a law firm. Today, individuals find success and satisfaction

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in firms, in-house, municipalities, nonprofits, entrepreneurial efforts, and more. With this expanded setting for lawyers to find satisfaction, it often follows that they can provide greater contributions back to their communities, families, personal lives, and other professional organizations. More and more I see my young lawyer colleagues exploring alternative legal careers, often for the flexibility, and ultimately, the balance they bring to their lives.

However, young lawyers often share that they face skepticism and stigma for these choices. There is a misconception that those that seek better work-life integration are lazier than their colleagues or that alternative legal careers are easier than traditional ones. I would like to dispel that notion.

I myself went in-house a year ago. It was not because I was unhappy with my firm, but rather because an in-house position offered flexibility I could not achieve in a traditional setting. As in-house counsel I interact daily with people across the country, rather than down the hall. As such, I don’t have to necessarily commute to a brick-and-mortar location on a day-to-day basis to be effective. And because

I handle my own caseload of litigation, I can partake in self-directed flexible work hours, rather than the hours chosen by my partner colleagues.

I work very hard as in-house counsel and my job is as demanding as it was at my firm. However, the control I have over my day allows me to better balance the competing requirements of my life. This makes me a better mother, wife, bar member, and community contributor. Also, if I’m being honest, with this burden off my shoulders, I am actually a far better lawyer.

Joshua Devine, treasurer of the Young Lawyers Section and associate general counsel at UnitedHealthcare, describes a similar situation: “After roughly five years and working in a few different firm settings, I decided to make the transition to an in-house position. While I actually enjoyed the hustle of building a book of business and meeting with potential clients, as a new father I appreciate the ability to replace that work by spending added time with my family.”

Christopher Klepps, secretary of the Young Lawyers Section and senior counsel at The Hartford also agrees: “I enjoyed

my time in private practice but, after six years, I was ready for a change for a variety of reasons. Most notably, with a toddler at home and another child on the way, I was looking for a position with more flexibility than is possible in a billable hour-driven environment.”

Both have found satisfaction and challenge in their alternative legal positions. “I had reservations about leaving behind the ‘real lawyer work,’” said Attorney Klepps. “Fortunately, my current position allows me to work on the same types of complex insurance coverage cases that I worked on in private practice (albeit in a different capacity).” Attorney Devine added, “As an associate at a law firm, I worked on a wide variety of matters crossing several practice areas ranging from commercial litigation to residential closings. Now, as in-house counsel, I now have the ability to focus on one area

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of law and hone my craft in ways I was not necessarily able to as an associate at a firm.”

This discussion is not to disparage firms (including my previous employer who has been supportive in my transition, and with whom I still maintain a good working and personal relationship) that are adjusting to needs with alternative work schedules and work from home options. Slowly but steadily I hear that the concept of the traditional legal workforce is changing in Connecticut, which I believe will in turn attract and maintain young lawyers to our state.

The metaphoric work plate has expanded in shape, size, color, and weight, varying greatly for each individual—let’s support each other by allowing each bar member to find a personal equilibrium. ■

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