

## Plate #2: The Family ‘Whirl’wind

By AMANDA G. SCHREIBER

**C**onduct yourself every day so that others know they can trust you to get it done.

If I had to provide advice to a young lawyer, this would top the list. Increasingly young lawyers have more of an expectation that work can and should sometimes yield to family time, but seeking out that balance with a legal career can be challenging.

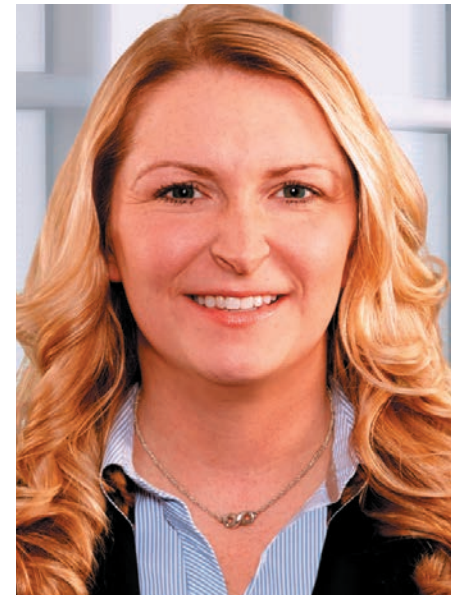
For those continuing to follow, I have dedicated my column this year to exploring the juggling act of the present-day young lawyer and how leaders in the legal community can help young lawyers find balance to enable not just productivity, but a healthier, happier life. The perspective comes from watching a plate spinning act at a circus themed show in Hartford and likening my own experience as a young lawyer to this theatrical performance. I marveled at the careful balancing to keep the plates twirling in the air—it felt a lot like the job, house, marriage, finances, kids, health, and wellbeing I try to keep in rotation every day.

None of those plates are more valuable than family. In the plate spinning act, it is the fine china, strong and reinforced, but irreplaceable and delicate in its own way. Nonetheless, I often find among my young lawyer friends (and I’m ashamed to say in my own life) that sometimes it is not given the priority, value, and attention it deserves.

Perhaps it’s because the whirlwind of family comes on so quickly. One minute

you are practicing law and working late hours, attending networking events, and worried about no one but yourself. Then overnight you are married with a child and scrambling to pick up from daycare on time, making cookies for the bake sale, and crossing your fingers that box of diapers gets delivered today.

And while my life follows the trajectory above, the need to balance and sometimes prioritize family over work is not just limited to those with young children. Family can constitute a multitude of people and things, including significant others, pets, parents, brothers and sisters, or that new relationship that seems like “the one.” A newly engaged couple may need additional time to plan for their wedding. A beloved pet may be ailing and require multiple veterinary appointments. A person may need to take time off to assist an elderly parent in their post-surgery needs. All are equally important as they signify the most cherished bonds in that young lawyer’s life, and they should not only be allowed, but encouraged, to prioritize them.



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So, among all this chaos of spinning plates, with the fine china requiring special attention and dedication to ensure it does not fall—how do we get it all done?

Perhaps balance can only truly be achieved with a change in perspective. First, we must dispel any idea that a lawyer’s dedication to their family somehow makes them less ambitious or dedicated to the craft. Most young lawyers I know are looking for a robust career with all the responsibility and high level work that comes with it—it’s just a matter of knowing they can leave at 5 p.m. to pick up a child from daycare or keep those Friday plans with mom to celebrate her birthday. This seems like such a simple thing to ask for, yet it’s a privilege few attorneys of any age enjoy.

Second, we must shift our focus to value those that are efficient and results-oriented. While the billable hour world we live in often makes this difficult, I challenge our legal community to incentivize these areas. The young lawyers that juggle the many competing demands of their life are some of the most efficient, but

also creative and insightful colleagues I know. Their ability to multi-task is unprecedented and they have learned the advanced yet difficult task of prioritizing workload. Results-oriented leadership that values someone who can produce efficient, high quality work while meeting deadlines is not only critical for overall balance in a lawyer's life, but for maintaining workers who produce superior work.

Cindy Cieslak, chair-elect of the Young Lawyers Section and partner at Rose Kallor LLP, agrees and suggests that young lawyers "find what works. Mainly, what worked for my family is that I made sure that I work with people I enjoy and trust, who can also trust me. My colleagues know that if I have to take some time off to care for my son, family or myself, that I do it when either there is time in my schedule that allows for it, or if a work matter is pressing and a family emergency arises, I will make ar-



rangements to ensure the work is timely completed. They care about the end result."

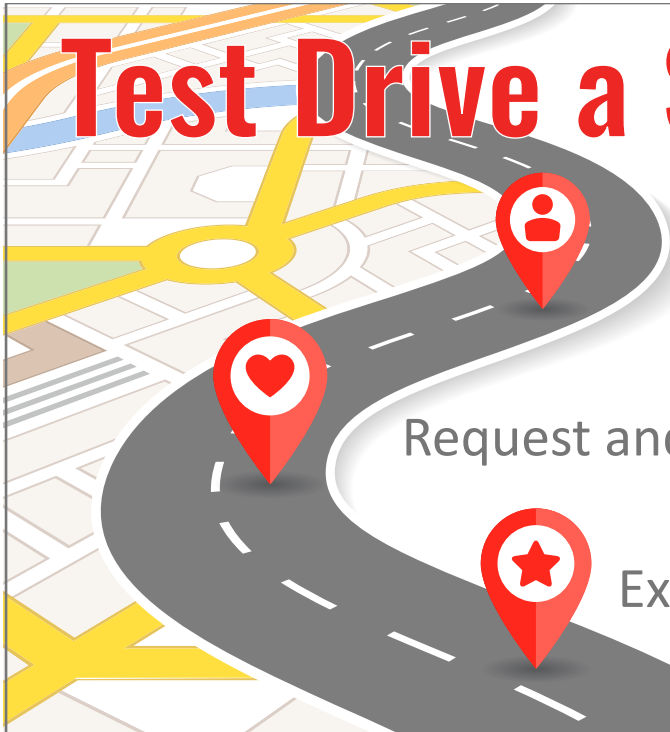
Trent LaLima, CLE director of the Young Lawyers Section and partner at Santos

& LaLima PC, suggests that technology helps drive his efficiency: "Older lawyers must recognize that with newer technology, much more can be accomplished remotely than ever before. This allows younger lawyers, especially those with children, more flexibility and there is less need to be tied to the office. My older partner has been very understanding of this new reality. I work hard for my clients, but working efficiently is not only important but critical to my success."

Thus, to my struggling young lawyers I give the following message: prioritize your cherished family time and do not let that plate fall. But realize that with balance comes a responsibility and dedication on your part to still keep your other plates—including your work plate—spinning. When you show others that their trust in you is not misplaced, great things can come from the balance you find together. ■

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