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LOS ANGELES' **Women Leaders in the Law**™



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The Women of Phillips,
Lerner, Lauzon & Jamra
Balancing Careers with Family Life

Why Deborah Chang
Switched Sides



PHILLIPS, LERNER, LAUZON & JAMRA LLP

AZITA AVEDISSIAN | GRACE JAMRA | STACY D. PHILLIPS



Stacy D. Phillips

Grace Jamra

Azita Avedessian

"People feel they belong here. It's not a 9-5 job that people show up for and then go home, just to get a paycheck"

In a profession where tradition dictates practice, family law firm Phillips, Lerner, Lauzon & Jamra's approach to growing its members is almost novel in its simplicity. Upon joining the firm, attorneys are simply asked what they want to do with their career and what they want to focus on – be it arguing in court, building their book of business or becoming master writers – and the firm does its best to nurture these desires. That question is asked again and again as people change over time, especially as they feel more secure. Attorneys are able to develop the skills that they believe they can bring to the table, and the firm retains a group of talented individuals who sense they are a part of what they're contributing to, rather than a group of people sharing a workspace. "People feel they belong here because their professional talents are acknowledged and development is encouraged. It is this unique relationship between the firm and its individual attorneys which allows them to contribute and share in the growth of the firm," says partner Azita Avedessian.

Though the firm is completely supportive of the duties that all of its members—from senior partners to the file clerks—must fulfill as wives and mothers, husbands and fathers, and single parents, this overriding philosophy was not borne out of a desire to pay special attention to women's issues, but rather to encourage firm members to flourish as individuals with unique abilities and needs, and to want to share these abilities with their colleagues and clients. "I would like to see our mass culture approach life in that way as a whole. I stopped being a sole practitioner because I wanted other people to share in building something, to take over for me in a way that they treated the clients as importantly as I treated the clients," says co-founding partner Stacy D. Phillips.

By acknowledging that personal obligations are a part of who its attorneys are and influence the work they do, PLLJ advocates that its members find more of the work-life balance that so often eludes their clients—a lifelong struggle for any career professional and human being. "As women, we tend to have caretaking and nurturing qualities and the more we bring those characteristics to an office environment, the more it becomes a place where people are really valued for their own contributions and singled out for the particular aspects they bring to the firm," says partner Grace Jamra.

Because the partners are keenly adept in all facets of family law and well known for their successes, many national media—print, broadcast and Internet—call upon them frequently (as members of their elite core of family law expert sources) to offer commentary on the family law cases of the day.



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PHILLIPS, LERNER, LAUZON & JAMRA LLP

WOMEN LEADERS COVER STORY:

Balancing Legal Life with Family—Ideas from Women at a Prominent Los Angeles Law Firm

Balancing a personal life and a high-powered legal career, isn't easy. It can be done—if you have enough drive, a great support system, and don't need a lot of sleep, advises LA divorce attorney Stacy D. Phillips, whose client roster includes the very famous and the very wealthy, and who's been ranked by numerous magazines and organizations as one of the leading litigators in California.

It also helps to have a really flexible schedule.

Last August, Phillips got married to Tom Holliday, a senior partner and trial attorney at Gibson Dunn and Crutcher—but more than five months would pass before the not-so-newlyweds could get away for a honeymoon. In fact, they barely saw each other in the two months leading up to the wedding, since Holliday was in Arkansas preparing for a trial. He arrived just days before the ceremony, and returned to Arkansas the day after the nuptials. Their crushing trial schedules precluded any vacation, but finally, in January, the couple flew to Sydney for a long honeymoon in Australia and New Zealand—a forced period of relaxation that, while wonderful, has been a bit unsettling for Phillips, one of the busiest divorce lawyers in the state.

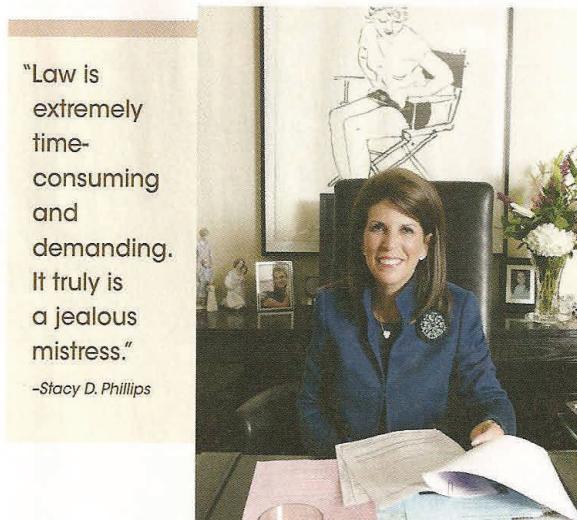
"This trip was a big step for me," admits Phillips, who, as founding partner of family law powerhouse Phillips, Lerner, Lauzon & Jamra is used to working at least 50 and sometimes more than 70 hours a week. "I have worked too much. I need to slow down to a human level and am trying to do that. It is very difficult for me given the expectations and demands on me and who I am."

It's especially hard to do in the field of family law, where the issues are

so personal. As she and her partners note, "Every client is a heart beat." Says Phillips, "Law is extremely time-consuming and demanding. It truly is a jealous mistress." As for balance, she says, "Balance is an illusion. You just do what you can and hope that the kids, the clients, the office, and yourself somehow benefit as and when needed."

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—Stacy D. Phillips

a week to philanthropic endeavors and professional organizations, and has authored a book, *Divorce: It's All Control—How to Win the Emotional, Psychological and Legal Wars*. She has so much more she wants to accomplish that she doesn't envision slowing down anytime soon. "I do lots more than practice law," says Phillips. "I am a mom, I am a new wife, I write, I am developing potential TV shows," and



What's her advice to young women lawyers starting out today? "Don't expect to have balance—just do your best," she says. "Work really hard if you expect to achieve, and if you just want to have an easy job, law is not for you. If working part-time works for you, your family, and your firm or company—fabulous. But don't expect things to be handed to you on a silver platter, as your 'bosses' are from a different generation, and the work ethic of our generation is very different than those coming up the ranks today."

Phillips, who frequently appears on national and local TV and in national magazines discussing divorce and family law, contributes 10 to 15 hours

she has many other projects. So how does she do it? Well, she admits, sleep is a luxury. Phillips gets only three to six hours a night, although she tries to catch up on weekends, a goal at which she is only sporadically successful. It also helps that she has a higher energy level than the average person, she concedes. When her children were young, she was fortunate that their father was very supportive, and her former mother-in-law lived with them and helped care for the kids. Phillips' own parents were nearby and also assisted with the children. Today, that extended support system continues. "I am very lucky. I have a great former spouse who has a wonderful wife who is great to my kids," she says.



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